

Bandwagon

Vol. 59 No. 4 2015



The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

© 2015 Feld Entertainment



RINGLING BROS.[®] THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH[®] BARNUM & BAILEY

Happy
HOLIDAYS

RINGLING BROS.[®] THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH[®] BARNUM & BAILEY
PRESENTS
LEGENDS

LEGENDS, a circus experience so incredible, it could only be brought to you by **Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey**®! Prepare to witness circus feats you thought were so amazing, that they would be impossible, and spectacles of strength so grand you once thought them to be unbelievable. **Ringling Bros.**® has combed the globe to find the most skilled circus masters for **LEGENDS**, be it the most majestic animals you've ever seen, the most exotic performers from far away lands, or the most fearless daredevils that take danger to unheard of levels, this show has no equal. **LEGENDS** is going to take you on an adventure that will dazzle your senses, and redefine your sense of possibility! Behold, **Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Presents LEGENDS**, **BELIEVE IN THE UNBELIEVABLE!!!**

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey® Presents **Circus XTREME** - It's time for your family to be amazed by all the X-TRAORDINARY things you know and love about America's favorite live family entertainment experience. Be astonished by UN-XPECTED circus spectacles you've never seen before and that can't be seen anywhere else but at **The Greatest Show On Earth**®. Get ready for an X-HILARATING adventure with X-TRAORDINARY circus artists and magnificent X-OTIC animals! It's time to awaken the spirit of *Children Of All Ages* and stir the imagination of your family! **Ringling Bros.**® Presents **Circus XTREME**. It's time to have XTREME fun with your family! Get your tickets today!

RINGLING BROS.[®] THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH[®] BARNUM & BAILEY
PRESENTS
CIRCUS XTREME



Ringling.com

Editors

Jennifer Lemmer Posey,
Editor
chsbandwagon@gmail.com

Fred Dahlinger, Jr.,
Associate Editor

Bandwagon: The Journal of the Circus Historical Society (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968) is published by the Circus Historical Society for its members.

Office of Publication

1075 West Fifth Avenue,
Columbus OH 43212 with
additional entry at Jefferson
City MO. Periodical postage
paid at Columbus OH and
additional entry offices.
Postmaster: send all address
changes to Bandwagon: The
Journal of the Circus Historical
Society, 1075 Fifth Avenue,
Columbus OH 43212.

Membership Rate

Circus Historical Society
membership is \$60.00
annually in the United States,
\$80.00 annually in Canada,
and \$105.00 annually for
international members.
Membership application and
information are available on
the CHS website at www.circushistory.org or by
contacting the Bandwagon
office.

Website and Back Issues

An index of Bandwagon
articles from earlier issues
is available online at www.circushistory.org. Back issues
are available from the Office of
Publication.

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

2015 Volume 59, Number 4

Table of Contents

Note from the Editor 4

On the Covers 5

by Jennifer Lemmer Posey
Baraboo along the river, 1910



The Baraboo River waterfront

The Circus City 8

An overview of the various
winter quarters of Baraboo
by Pete Shrake



Ringling Wardrobe Department

Circus Kings Castles 40

The Baraboo Homes of the Ringlings
by Paul Wolter



Taking a break on Al's castle

Circus World Museum 54

Kelley's Vision Brought to Life
by Greg Parkinson



John Kelley and Rhonda Fleming

Circus Historical Society

circushistory.org

Mission Statement

*"To preserve, promote, and share
through education the history and
cultural significance of the circus and
allied arts, past and present."*

2014 Officers

President

Deborah W. Walk
Sarasota, FL

Vice President

Don Covington
Coronado, CA

Secretary-Treasurer

Robert Cline
Cheraw, SC

2014 Board of Trustees

Chris Berry
Scottsdale, AZ

Joe Parker
Dallas, TX

Maureen Brunsdale
Normal, IL

Fred D. Pfening III
Columbus, OH

Alan Campbell
Johns Creek, GA

John Polacsek
Detroit, MI

Stephen T. Flint
Janesville, WI

Al Stencell
Toronto, ON

Stephen Gossard
Bloomington, IL

M. Lane Talburt
Stratford, CT

Judith L. Griffin
Appleton, WI

Matthew Wittmann
Denver, CO

Trustees Emeritus

Dave Price
Robert Sabia

Richard J. Reynolds III
William Slout

Note from the Editor

In truth, this note should be coming from Peter Shrake, Archivist at Circus World, who took on the monumental task of getting together a rich variety of material on Baraboo, Wisconsin's circus heritage.

This entire issue explores topics that help us better understand the impact of circuses on the sites of their winter quarters, this time specifically the shows that called Baraboo, Wisconsin home during their off seasons. The relationship of a circus and its winter home was always a vibrant, symbiotic connection, with each shaping the character of the other. Much like the Sarasota issue that concluded Bandwagon's 2014 volume, this issue is a tip of the iceberg in terms of the content that can be explored related to Baraboo and the circus, but these three articles give a fascinating window on the topic.

The first, from Pete Shrake, sets the tone by reviewing the circuses that have wintered in Baraboo and their impact on the town. Paul Wolter, President of the Sauk County Historical Society, chronicles the homes built by several of the Ringlings in Baraboo. Through his study, one gains a clear understanding of how the brothers ultimately announced their success, and their individual personalities, in their chosen hometown. And finally, Greg Parkinson, Deputy Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society and former Director of Circus World, explores the relationships that were built as a group of passionate individuals worked together to assure the on-going vibrancy of Baraboo's relationship with the circus through the founding of Circus World.

Along with many thanks to the authors, who have written fascinating accounts that certainly expanded my knowledge, there are several others who made this issue possible. First and foremost, many thanks to John and Mardi Wells who were willing to give so much of their time to make sure this issue get out before the end of 2015 – making it possible for us to catch up on *Bandwagon's* publication schedule. And in spite of the time crunch, they have turned out another beautiful issue! Ralph Pierce has graciously allowed us to use a photo from his collection, a unique view of the Gollmar Winter Quarters in Baraboo, for our cover. Thanks also to Fred Dahlinger and Deborah Walk for insight and advice along the way. A final thank you and congratulations to Pete Shrake for the hard work of pulling this material together.

JLP

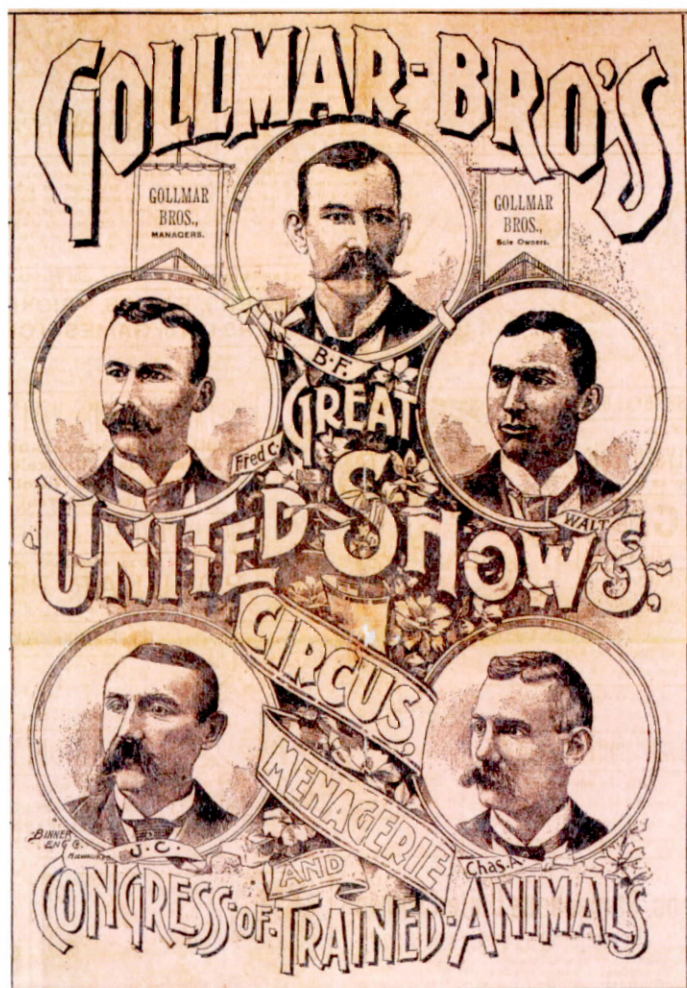
On the Covers

by Jennifer Lemmer Posey

Photographed around 1910, our cover image from the collection of CHS member Ralph D. Pierce, presents a deceptively quiet view of a tract of land on the Baraboo River. Given the signs of use on the practice ring, it is possible that had the photo been taken a few weeks earlier, the property would most likely have been abuzz with activity as the Gollmar Bros. Circus made preparations for a new season. Although the Gollmar quarters were quiet on that day over one hundred years ago, the picture does suggest the importance of the resident circuses, particularly the Ringling and Gollmar shows, to the town of Baraboo. The land that both shows occupied and the money they brought into the local economy were important indicators of the great success of these circus men from Baraboo.

Just as the purchase of land and growth of their various quarters signaled their success to the local community, both sets of brothers used advertising to announce their success to potential audiences in advance of their show's

arrivals. Like their contemporaries, the Ringlings and the Gollmars proudly included their portraits on heralds, couriers, and posters, lending their advertisements an additional layer of trustworthiness. An 1890 courier clearly proclaiming their new status as a railroad circus, featured the brothers: clockwise from upper left: John (1866-1936), Otto (1858-1911), Alf. T. (1861-1919), Charles (1863-1926), and at center, Al (1852-1916). They ranged in age from youngest, John at a mere 24, to the oldest, Al only 38 years old. Their cousins, the Gollmars were similarly able to announce their own success, putting a show on the rails in 1891. Their portraits occupied the top half of a courier for their United Shows featuring the Circus, Menagerie and Congress of Trained Animals, circa 1892. The Gollmars, clockwise from top: Benjamin (1864-1947), Walter (1869-1933), Charles (1861-1929), Jacob Claud (1849-1896), and Fredrich (1867-1965). With one hundred and twenty-five years of perspective from these advertisements, it is still remarkable to contemplate the accomplishments of these boys from Baraboo.



Gollmar Bros. Great United Shows courier (detail), circa 1892. Ringling Bros. United Monster Railroad Shows (detail), 1890.

both from the Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

YOUR FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT TRADITION!

★ Royal ★ Hanneford CIRCUS

WISHES YOU

HAPPIEST OF HOLIDAYS!



Founded By **Tommy & Struppi Hanneford**

**THE TRADITION
CONTINUES!**

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE HISTORY

THE EDUCATION OF A
CIRCUS CLOWN

Mentors, Audiences, Mistakes

David Carlyon

Palgrave Studies in Theatre and
Performance History

Hardback 9781137554819
Nov 2015 £60.00 \$95.00 \$110.00CAN

David Carlyon is author of the critically-acclaimed book, *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of*. He is Adjunct Professor at Iona College, USA, has worked as an assistant professor at the University of Michigan, Flint, USA, taught at Northwestern University, USA, and was on the Speakers Bureau of the New York Council for the Humanities, USA. He is an ex-Ringling Brothers and Barnum Bailey Circus clown, produced playwright, director, and Equity actor, studying at London's National Theatre Summer Programme, UK. He graduated from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, served in the US Army, earned his JD from Boalt Hall, University of California, Berkeley, USA, and received his PhD from Northwestern University, USA.

The Education of a Circus Clown

Mentors, Audiences, Mistakes

David Carlyon

Coming November 2015

"David Carlyon ran away from a lucrative legal career to join the circus. His beautifully immersive personal history captures the gritty excitement and deep camaraderie of his first circus season. *The Education of a Circus Clown* is a terrific and important book that will enrich and enliven our historical understanding of clowning, the circus, and American culture."

- Janet M. Davis, American Studies and History, University of Texas at Austin, USA, author of *The Circus Age: American Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*, and editor of *Tiny Kline, Circus Queen and Tinker Bell: The Life of Tiny Kline*

"The literature of clowning, like that of other performing arts, is full of anecdote-laden memoirs that shed little if any light on the actual craft of the performer. *The Education of a Circus Clown* is a rare exception because David Carlyon is both a professional writer and a professional performer who offers us not just a behind-the-scenes look at life in the clown alley of the world's largest circus, but also an honest and at times anguished analysis of the performer's daily struggle to be funny. Entertaining and illuminating."

- John Towsen, author of *Clowns* and the physical comedy blog *All Fall Down*

"An important history - as all-encompassing as it is personal - and a great look into the mind of a performing artist. If you want to know what *real* American circus life is like, then this book is for you. If you don't... well, then you're missing something wonderful."

- Murray Horwitz, Tony Award-winning playwright (*Ain't Misbehavin'*), creator of NPR's *Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me*, and a former Ringling clown

About the book

The 1960s American hippie-clown boom fostered many creative impulses, including neo-vaudeville and Ringling's Clown College. However, the origin of that impulse, clowning with a circus, has largely gone unexamined. David Carlyon, through an autoethnographic examination of his own experiences in clowning, offers a close reading of the education of a professional circus clown, woven through an eye-opening, sometimes funny, occasionally poignant look at circus life. Layering critical reflections of personal experience with connections to wider scholarship, Carlyon focuses on the work of clowning while interrogating what clowns actually do, rather than using them as stand-ins for conceptual ideas or as sentimental figures.

CONTENTS

Come-in: Introducing Key Concepts and Avoiding Clichés

1. Romance of the Red Nose: Ringling "Clown College" Experience
2. Bowl of Cherries: Easy Adjustment to Circus Rehearsals
3. The Rubber (Nose) Meets the Road: Hard Adjustment to Rigors of Trouping
4. The Show Business: Finding Performance Truth in Business Necessities
5. Love 'em and Leave 'em: Making the Work of Clowning Personal
6. The Good Old Days?: The Past Informs the Present, and Isn't Really Past
7. Rodeo Route: Routine Drags, Then Offers Inspiration
8. Spirit of St. Louis: Losing and Finding A Performance Partner
9. Live: Being Alive to Genuine Human Interaction
10. Stop Giggling: Using the Immediate Moment to Create Comedy
11. Clown Mask: Fighting Clichés and Enacting Them
12. So Far, So Good: Lessons of the Veterans, A New Veteran's Lessons

Appendix A: 1976 Clown College and 1977 Blue Unit Route

Appendix B: A Brief Cultural Idiosyncratic (Mostly Circus, Mainly American) Clowning History, as a Means of Providing Context for the Preceding Individual Idiosyncratic (Mostly Circus, Mainly Evolving) Clown's History

UK, Europe, & ROW (excl. Australia & Canada):
Direct Customer Services,
Palgrave Macmillan,
The Macmillan Campus,
4 Crinan Street
London, N1 9XW, UK
Tel: 0207 418 5802
Email: orders@palgrave.com

USA:
Palgrave Macmillan, VHP,
16365 James Madison Highway
(US route 15), Gordonsville,
VA 22942, USA
Email: consumerorders@mpsva.org

Australia:
Customer Services,
Palgrave Macmillan,
Level 1, 15-19 Claremont St.
South Yarra
VIC 3141, Australia
Tel: +61 3 9811 2555 (free call)
Email: orders@unitedbookdistributors.com.au





FIRST NATIONAL BANK.



DEVILS LAKE



BARABOO-CIRCA 1886
Reprint by S.C.H.S.

REFERENCES.

1. Court House.
2. Post Office, M. H. Mead, P. M.
3. School House.
4. City Reserve.
5. Presbyterian Church.
6. Congregational Church.
7. Baptist Church.
8. Free Congregational Church.
9. Episcopal Church.
10. Catholic Church.
11. German Evangelical Church.
12. German Lutheran Church.
13. German Methodist Church.
14. South Side Methodist Church.
15. Y. M. C. A. Building.
16. H. Jackson, General Merchandise.
17. Julia Hopper, Clothing.
18. J. D. Bergert, Meat Market.
19. H. P. Jones, Clothing.

BARABOO, WIS.

COUNTY SEAT OF SAUK CO.

Three Miles North of DEVILS LAKE. The famous Summer Resort of Wisconsin
and within easy reach of the DELLS of Wis. River.

20. Fisher Bros., Druggists.
21. W. H. Adams, Groceries.
22. Mead & Buckley, Books and Stationery.

23. J. R. Holmstrom, Dry Goods and Groceries.
24. M. Bentley, Attorney at Law, up stairs.
25. Emery & Shultz, Real Estate, up stairs.
26. Bank of Baraboo.
27. J. B. Doremus, Druggist and Medicines.

28. Stanley & Hogg, General Merchandise.
29. Ph. H. Krayen, Grocery.
30. "The Fair."



With Compliments of the

WARREN HOUSE.
T.M. WARREN, PROP'R.

WARREN HOUSE.

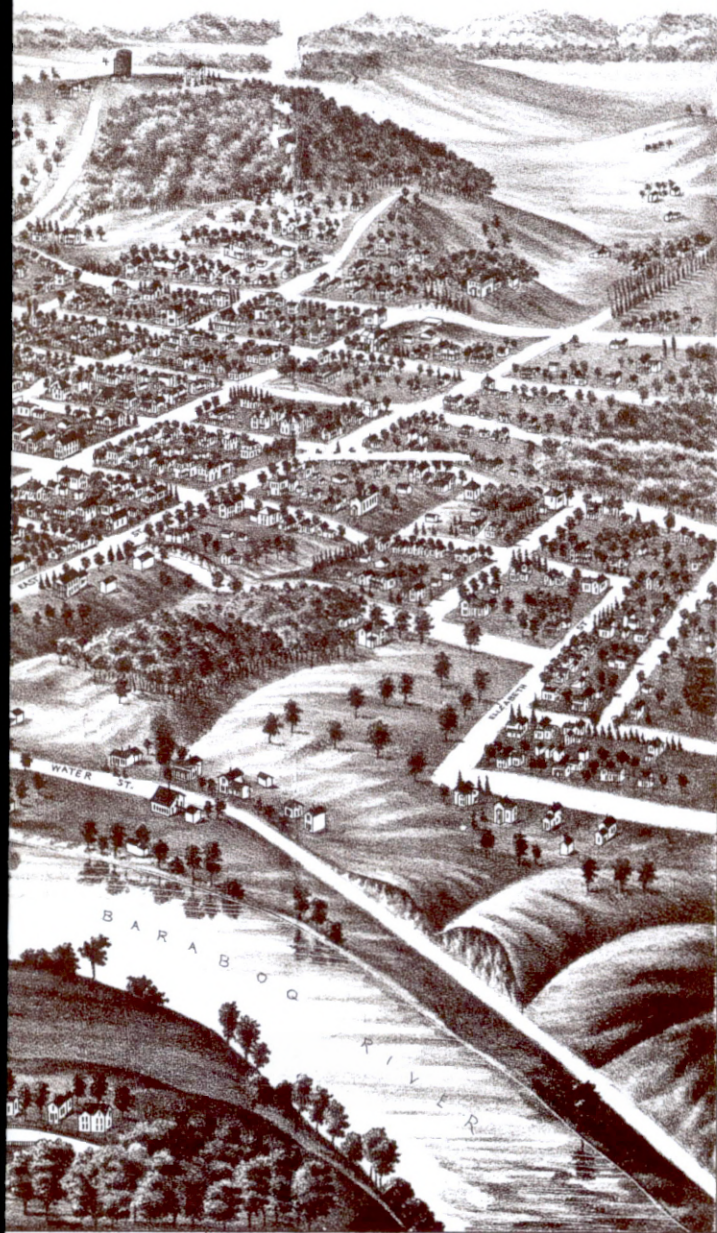
Accommodations First-Class.

RATES REASONABLE.

OPEN ALL THE YEAR.

CORRESPONDENCE SOLICITED

T. M. WARREN, Prop'r.



THE MILWAUKEE LITHO & ENGR. CO.

2. Shuman, New Depot.
3. H. Barnes, General Store.
4. W. B. & Co. Barber Shop.
5. Reinking, Reinkens Dry Goods.
6. P. Johnson, Flour & Feed.
7. Albrecht & Schind, Wisconsin House.
8. First National Bank.
9. Warren House.
10. Perkins & Teal, Flour & Feed.
11. Baraboo Window Mills.
12. Baraboo Brewery.
13. Baraboo House.
14. M. Reed & Sons, Sash and Door Factory.
15. L. & F. M. Stewart, Lumber Yard.
16. Baraboo Roller Mills.
17. J. H. Hurlbut, General Merchandise.
18. Phil. Beck's Barber Shop and Bath Room.
19. Richards & Son, Lumber Yard.
20. Ward Mennen, Ware House.



EAST SIDE OF SQUARE

The Circus City

An overview of the various winter quarters of Baraboo

by Pete Shrake

The last Sunday of April 1893 was bright and clear. It was a fine day for the Ringling brothers to pitch their tents for the opening show of the performance season. As had been the case for the past nine years the first show was in the circus's home town of Baraboo.¹ The preceding weeks had seen the city undergo a remarkable transformation. The appearance of "sparkling" new posters on the bill boards around town was always a good sign that the Ringlings were almost ready to take their show on the road.² Then the performers started to return from the winter vaudeville circuit. Robert Gollmar, whose father Walter was one of the owners of Baraboo's other circus, the Gollmar Bros., would recall years later "The streets have been lined with a cosmopolitan mixture of humanity." Alf T. Ringling noted that "Swarthy Arabs, Syrians, and Moors good-naturedly elbow against the sons and daughters of flowery Japan, while American and European artists interchange reminiscences of past experiences and form new acquaintances."³ Herds of horses from both the Gollmar and Ringling Bros. Circus crammed the streets as Robert Gollmar remembered "From winter pastures the horses had returned to the winter quarters. Heavy parade wagons lumbered aimlessly, yet purposefully, through the streets."⁴

A Birds Eye Map of Baraboo, 1886.

Sauk County Historical Society



A street parade of the Gollmar Bros. Circus makes its way east down 3rd St. passing the Sauk County Courthouse in Baraboo, 1908.
from *Circus World*

With the performers and animals also came canvas men, teamsters, and other manual laborers needed to run the show in the coming months. The overcrowding in the city sometimes caused friction between local residents and the roustabouts. A local paper, the *Sauk County Democrat* observed, "When any depredations are committed these days many people jump at the conclusion that it is due to the circus gang, which is larger now than ever, because the helpers are all centered here awaiting the time for the circus to leave." But the paper was quick to point out that; "The circus helpers, now perform only manual labor, may be a 'rough and ready' sort of men, but as far as we can learn they are attending to their work."⁵

The city swelled with spectators from all around Sauk County as well as the neighboring counties. A grand street parade showcasing the newly painted and gilded wagons proceeded

through town ending up at the circus show grounds at the end of 4th St. The first show of the season would take place, possibly on what one local historian referred to as the "old city circus grounds" located at the corner of 3rd and Camp Streets (today the site of Langer Park).⁶



Langer Park, 2015, site of the "circus grounds" referenced by Bill Kasiska in 1936.
photo by author



Wagons and teams of horses pass by the railroad depot on their way to be loaded onto railcars.



Both images date sometime after 1902

both photos from Circus World

As soon as the performances were over the show was packed onto wagons and headed to the Baraboo rail yards past the great depot of the Chicago and North Western Railroad where equipment was loaded onto flat cars and employees crowded into coach cars. By the next day the circus was gone, on the road for another season. Two weeks later the whole scene would all be repeated when the Gollmar Bros. put up their first show of the season. By the middle of May Baraboo was once again quiet, resuming its normal rhythms of activity.

In many ways Baraboo was a typical late 19th century community, no different from countless other growing towns across the Midwest. By 1890 the city, not quite 50

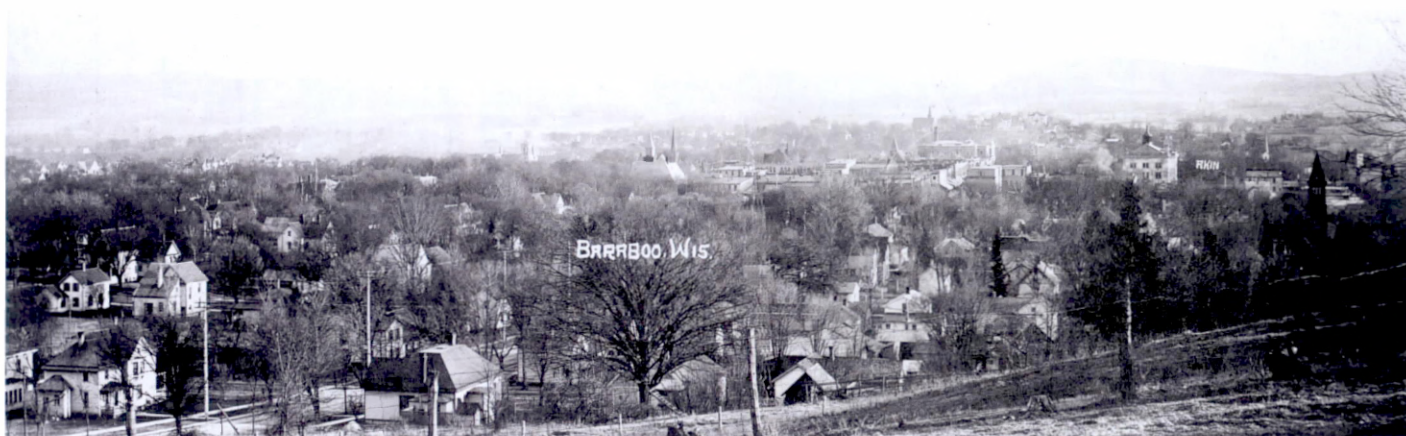
years old, had a population of just 4605.⁷ The community had only recently incorporated as a city, in 1882. The main economic driver was the water powers of the Baraboo River. At no other point in the 70 mile long river was there such a concentration of rapids which in turn provided an excellent location to build dams. Three dams were ultimately built, providing power to grist mills, saw mills, furniture factories, woolen and textile mills, and eventually hydroelectric power to the city. Geographically Baraboo is located approximately half way between Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul, a location that did not escape the notice of the managers of the C&NW Railroad who developed an extensive set of repair shops on the city's south side in the 1870s. Since the 1840s Baraboo was also the seat of government for Sauk County; a region that was, and still is, dominated by agriculture.

From 1884 to 1918 Baraboo was the home, at one time or another, for six circuses, numerous circus employees, and the location of a circus wagon manufactory.⁸ The circus was imbedded in nearly every corner of the town. Two large winter quarters rested on the banks of the Baraboo River. A third and much smaller winter training facility was located in a residential neighborhood in the northeast corner of town. The start and end to Baraboo's circus career can be linked one way or another to the Ringling Brothers. It was in Baraboo that the brothers first built their show, and here they remained for over 30 years.⁹ Every circus venture that followed was either inspired by or led by family members or former employees of the Ringlings.



Loading site, 2015.

photo by author



A panoramic overview of Baraboo looking south, circa 1907. Devils Lake is in the distance just right of center. The

courthouse clock tower can be seen at center right.

from the Sauk County Historical Society

Establishing the winter quarters

The Baraboo winter quarters, like the Ringling Bros. Circus itself, had a humble start. After several years performing in a variety of smaller Wisconsin shows, Al Ringling convinced his brothers to strike out on their own and start a circus. But putting together a show requires a lot of workspace so the five brothers rented an empty grocery store near the corner of Oak St. and 2nd. It was a “small, cheap shop room on a side street” as Alf T. Ringling would remember and referred locally as the “Robert’s Building.” It was here in early May 1884 a reporter for the *Sauk County Democrat* found the brothers “working like beavers getting everything in readiness for their show which opens the season in this city on the 19th of this month.”¹⁰ The list of projects was endless but first the brothers decided they needed to build their seating and as Alf T. recalled, “they did a lot of extra work, because they had to learn not only how to do the work but also the manner of construction of the seats.” Three second hand wagons were purchased; one to serve as the advance wagon, and the other two to transport the equipment of the show.¹¹ The first performance was held only a block away from the Roberts Building at the corner of 2nd Ave. and Broadway.

The show grew steadily over the next few years and more space was needed to develop new acts, house the growing menagerie, and repair the

show for the next season. In 1886 the brothers rented the Bassett Stave factory (sometimes referred to as the Baraboo Butter Tub Factory), a former part of the extensive Bassett Mills that once dominated the northern bank of the river. In April 1887 in what is probably the first detailed account of the Ringling winter quarters a reporter for the *Baraboo Republic* remarked that the old factory was:

“One of the busiest places in the city is the winter quarters of Ringling Bros’ Five, Big, United Monster Shows. Here all is life and activity, in making preparations for the summer show tour. Here is to be seen painters, giving carriages and wagons bright new coats of paint; harness makers making new harnesses and repairing old ones; the trainers,



The intersection of Oak and 2nd, 2015. The Roberts Building, where the Ringlings first framed out their circus in 1884 was located at center approximately where the Radio Shack store is now. The Roberts store was destroyed in a fire in October, 1884.

photo by author



The intersection of Rosaline and Water St. It was here that the Ringlings purchased the Bassett Stave mill and built the first set of winter quarters buildings in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

photo by author

putting the ring-horses through their daily lessons in the ring performances; carpenters making new tent-poles and seats. There is not an idle man to be found on the premises.”¹²

Later that fall local newspapers reported the brothers purchased the Bassett property, equal to the size of one-half block where: “They will build shops for the repairing of vehicles, harnesses, & c. And last but not least a training house for their ring horses and performing animals will be a leading feature.”¹³ Construction of the buildings was underway by early October 1889. That month it was reported that several new buildings “at Ringlingville” (the earliest documented use of the term) were being built under the supervision of Charles Ringling.¹⁴ The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company 1892 map for Baraboo showed a complex of eight buildings including an animal barn, practice/ring buildings, paint shop and three large barns or buildings at the intersection of Rosaline and Water St.¹⁵

Coinciding with the construction along Water St. was the development of railroad facilities. The same month that Charles started work on Water St. the newspapers reported that “the boys now talk of running a railroad show next season.”¹⁶ In November 1889 the brothers negotiated the purchase of

property from Mrs. Emma Potter to lay track to store the rail cars they intended to buy.¹⁷ The Potter property was a prime spot located next door to the C&NW roundhouse. In 1872 the railroad had built a line through the Baraboo bluffs and soon after established the city as the headquarters for its “Madison Division.” By 1879 an ever increasing complex of workshops, a 25 stall round house, and rail yards were spreading out on the south side of the river. It is safe to say that the railroad made Baraboo. A local promoter boasted “A few years ago, the place was scarcely known outside the radius of 50 miles, now it has become renowned, wherever civilization has penetrated the Western Hemisphere.”¹⁸

Perhaps that was a bit of an exaggeration but the fact that Baraboo had significant railroad facilities certainly was a decisive factor in the Ringling brothers maintaining their circus there for so long.

Having your own rail yard next to the extensive C&NW facilities had its advantages. Such close proximity provided easy access to repair shops and on a number of occasions the brothers leased space within the rail yard to refurbish their equipment. Painting the railcars however, was still done outdoors on the Potter parcel and subject to the whims of Wisconsin’s winter and springtime weather.



The intersection of Depot and Potter Streets. The original Ringling Car Shops were located behind the buildings at center.

photo by author



The Intersection of 1st and Ash Streets (once Bench and Bridge Streets). Sometimes identified as the location of the Ringling wardrobe department, this site was used as the paint shop and canvas storage and later housed the office. In 1892 the Sauk County Democrat reported "The Ringling Bros. have established a neat business office in the brick building on the corner of Bridge and Bench streets. Al. W. Melzl acts as chief clerk."

from Circus World

The exception was with specialized art work. In such cases space was secured inside the C&NW roundhouse. For example, in 1891, space was leased in the roundhouse for a specialist from Buffalo, New York to paint "dazzling pictures" onto Advertising Car No. 3.¹⁹ But the erratic weather and the pressing need to maintain a tight schedule, especially in the spring, resulted in a "large car shed" to be built on the Potter parcel in the winter of 1893. Finally painting could be done indoors and on the Ringlings' schedule.

But even with all of the new buildings the facilities along the river were not enough. The *Sauk County Democrat* reported in 1892 that "having all their regular workshops and store rooms crowded they [the Ringlings] are now renting every available room that suits their purposes." When local grocers, Peck and Cramer, moved to a new building, the brothers snatched up the old store (probably located on the southeast corner of Ash and Water St.) making it into a makeshift carpenter shop to build new seats.²⁰ This is in addition to seats being made by Reul and Sons at their factory a block away on the corner of East and Water. A three story building near Hoyt's mills (possibly at the north east corner of Water and Ash today) was rented and used to make harnesses (under the direction of their father August) and store lithographs.²¹ An old feed store near "Noyes Corners" (today the intersection of 1st and Ash) was turned into a paint shop, the back of the building stored canvas.

The preparation of the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows for each summer tour required a mammoth effort. By the turn of the century as many as 120 men were em-



The Intersection of 1st and Ash, 2015.

photo by author

ployed in Ringlingville many of whom needed temporary housing. With the Gollmar Bros. winter staff also seeking lodging, as well as the various mill and railroad workers, local hotels, boarding houses and restaurants were often at maximum capacity. As a result, in 1890, the brothers rented the Union Hotel, a simple two story wooden frame structure on the corner of Water and East, to provide housing for many of their winter staff. The building was modified to fit the needs of the circus men as the *Sauk County Democrat* reported that November, "The house has been refitted, and, to use a slang term, promises to become one of the leading hash foundries of the city."²² By 1898 the brothers purchased the hotel and eventually replaced it with the substantial three story brick building which still stands today. The new hotel, built during the summer of 1916 under the direction of Henry Ringling, was the last major structure built by the Ringling brothers in Baraboo. The first and second floors included a kitchen, dining hall, sleeping rooms as well as a "lobby reading room." The third floor was reserved for



The Union Hotel or as it was later known the Ringling Hotel, pre-1915.

from Sauk County Historical Society



Ringling Hotel, circa 1916.

from Circus World

men who arrived in the spring as the show prepared for the coming performance season. Any “colored help” employed by the show was quartered in the basement.²³

In the early years of Ringlingville the brothers focused their efforts on building structures for animal housing, training facilities and repair shops. Other facilities such as the wardrobe department, offices, and railroad car shops were often leased and only in later years consolidated with property owned by the brothers. The wardrobe department most certainly first operated out of the Roberts Building on Oak but by 1890 space was located on the 2nd floor of the Wright Block overlooking the courthouse square where the new costumes were sewn under the watchful eye of Lou Ringling.²⁴ Eight years later the department occupied space



For a brief period of time the wardrobe department operated out of this red brick building at 120 Ash St. photo by author

The Wright Block, 2015. The wardrobe department was located on the 2nd floor of the corner building.

photo by author





A view of the wardrobe department, most likely on the second floor of the new paint shop on Water St. circa 1913. Equestriennes Edna Curtis (standing in the dark striped

dress) and Elizabeth Rooney (wearing a white robe) model costuming. Charles Ringling is seated at the table with his head resting on his hand.

from Circus World

on the second floor of the original animal house (located approximately where the green Quonset building now stands). This structure temporarily served as a harness shop (first floor) and wardrobe dept. (second floor). Sometime after 1904 the department was relocated to an unknown site but by 1907 could be found at 120 Ash St., a narrow red brick building near the Walnut St. Bridge.²⁵

Like the wardrobe department the business office also seemed to float from location to location. The existing office, located next to the baggage horse barn was built around 1901. It was the second office building built on winter quarters grounds. An earlier office stood where the 1901 animal house now stands. This earlier building was most likely built prior to 1898. Before that the brothers rented build-

ings in the downtown area.²⁶ The surviving office building was remembered by Leonard Roser, one of the accountants who worked there, as a simple affair. It was nothing fancy, no rugs, "no plush." The brothers had roll top desks and tables. Al. maintained his office on the first floor in the back room, Alf T. and Charles had offices on the second floor. A brick vault (where the small side garage now stands) held the show records. The sparse setting belied a hectic atmosphere filled with bookkeepers, typewriters, stenographers, and writers.²⁷

The office staff represented only a fragment of all the employees that would have worked at the winter quarters. The Ringling Bros. employed painters, landscape and figure-piece artists, gilders, wagon wood-workers,

blacksmiths, saddlers, harness makers, costumers, sign writers, railroad car repairmen, carpenters, machinists, engineers, firemen to manage the boilers, and metal workers. The place was a hive of activity, as Alf. T. Ringling once wrote: "The fact is they never sleep. They nap occasionally."²⁸

The busy nature reflected the growing success of the show. After a particularly successful season in the winter of 1897-1898 significant additions were made. Land was purchased east of what is now the 1901 animal house. The property provided space for three new structures including a new animal house, elephant house, and a camel barn. Local builder Carl Isenberg was

hired to construct the buildings. Isenberg seemed to be the go-to contractor for most new construction after 1897.²⁹ A reporter for the *Sauk County Democrat* penned the following description of the new 1897 animal house:

"The animal house is in two compartments, the first of which housing the cat animals, such as lions, tigers, etc. These are kept in immense iron cages weighing a couple of tons each. In the rear room are kept the hay animals. In one corner is a monster tank where the hippopotami lazily drag their big bulks around. There are a male and female but they have to be kept separated or they will fight and do each other harm"³⁰

There was a real need for the new space. In addition to their own show, the Ringlings had leased the John Robinson Circus and for a year that show's equipment was also based out of Baraboo. The 1893 and 1894 seasons had not been successful for the John Robinson Circus. Business was so bad that the show owners spent the remainder of the decade struggling to recover their losses. To help offset the financial troubles the title and much of the show equipment were leased to the Ringling Bros in 1898. The brothers operated the title out of Baraboo for one year. For the Ringlings, there was a need to have another show play the Midwest as they took their own circus out east after Barnum left for Europe.³¹

The economic impact of the Ringlings on Baraboo was significant and felt not just through the patronage of local businesses in town but the surrounding countryside as a local resident observed, "There is scarcely a farmer in a ra-



Newly completed wagons for the Dode Fisk Circus line up outside of the Moeller Bros. Shop on 3rd Ave. from Circus World

dus of many miles who does not have something to sell to the Ringling Brothers."³² The elephants alone could require as much as 2,600 tons of hay. Even in the early years the show had a positive effect on local business. A reporter for the *Baraboo Republic* observed in 1890, "Ringling Brothers contribute no small amount to the volume of business of the city this winter. They have twenty-eight people on their pay-roll. Besides this the cost of keeping a large number of horses, animals, etc., to say nothing of the five Ringling Brothers' personal expenses, which help to reduce their bank account for the benefit of the community."³³

Chief among the local businesses patronized by the Ringlings was the Henry Moeller & Sons Wagon and Carriage Shop on 3rd Ave. Moeller, who was their uncle, would later build and repair a number of wagons used by both the



The high quality of construction and artistry of the Moeller workmanship is evident in these two wagons built for the Ringling Bros. in 1892. from Circus World

Gollmar and Ringling shows. In 1884, the Ringlings asked their uncle to make their first bandwagon and from that point on they became regular customers. In 1891 Moeller took his two sons, Corwin G. and Henry, Jr., into partnership with him. Upon the death of their father in 1908 the brothers changed the name of the business to the Moeller Brothers and continued to make circus wagons for many different shows.

Though they were known to make beautiful parade wagons the larger part of their work consisted of heavy baggage, stake driver, and electric generator wagons, as well as perform annual repairs of the Ringling rolling stock. The Bell Wagon is perhaps the most famous circus wagon created at the Moeller works. The Ringling brothers ordered the Bell Wagon for the 1892 season. Though the carvings and bells were produced by different companies in Milwaukee, the frame and final assembly was completed at the Moeller shop.

The primary mission of Ringlingville may have been to refurbish the show in the off season but it could also be useful fodder for the press as is evidenced by a particularly exaggerated article that made the rounds of newspapers from Minneapolis to Hawaii in 1893. The story goes that a young boy of a local Norwegian farmer who had come to the winter quarters to sell oats wandered into one of the buildings holding the snakes. The attendants were in the process of switching pythons and boa constrictors from their old cages to new ones and had inadvertently left a cage door open allowing a 32 foot boa to escape. When the attendants returned they were shocked to see two little legs protruding from the mouth of the gigantic snake. Henry Ringling happened to be nearby and:

"Without counting the cost or foreseeing the danger he grasped the serpent around the neck and commenced shaking it. With one swipe of its muscular tail it sent Mr. Ringling scurrying heels overhead across the floor. Al. Ringling happened in. He took in the situation at a glance. Grasping a long chain lying on the floor, he wrapped it around the serpent's body about 6 inches below where he thought the child's head may be. Directing several attendants to grasp either end of the chain and pull with all their strength, he was gratified to notice a relaxation of the snake's efforts to swallow the child....Two men inserted a wagon jack between his jaws and by degrees were pried open and the boy pulled out."³⁴

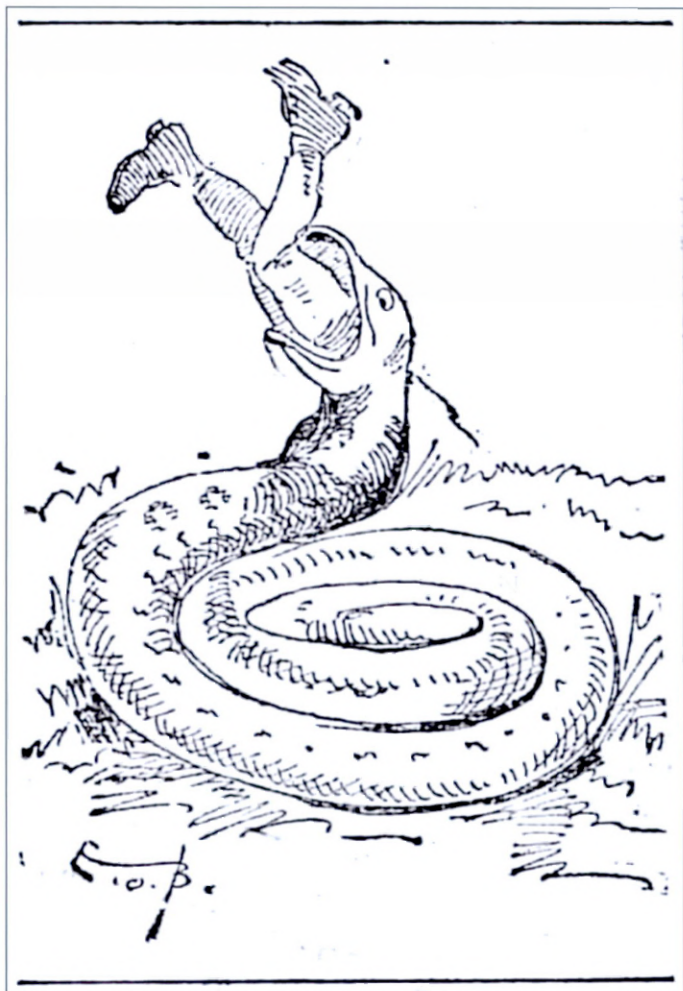
In addition to serving as a useful public relations

mechanism, the winter quarters was also a local tourist attraction. On specially designated days the Water Street buildings were open to the public and in May 1893 a reporter from the *Wichita Daily Eagle* described the experience of visiting the site. "By asking at the office you are provided with a pass and a guide (oh yes it is free to all) and if you are fortunate enough to attend on visitors day you have a treat that can be obtained nowhere else."³⁵ Among the many things that struck the reporter the elephants perhaps impressed him the most.

"Four of the ponderous brutes had turned into the elephant bath corral together, and what began as play among them turned into one of the most terrific fights ever witnessed by man. There were two male and two female elephants in the party, and as is too often the case the row started over jealousy. It was fully two hours before they could be separated."³⁶

With the advent of a new century there was a need for new additions to Ringlingville. In 1905 the Ringlings became joint owners with James A. Bailey of the Adam Forepaugh Sells Bros. Circus. A year later with Bailey's death came the opportunity to acquire full ownership in the show. The Forepaugh-Sells Circus was managed in part by August Ringling but his death in 1907 and declining revenues resulted in mothballing the show.³⁷ Half of the equipment was stored at Bridgeport, Connecticut, the other half at Ringlingville. Two years later the Forepaugh-Sells title was revived and managed under the direction of Al. Ringling. From 1910 through 1911 two major circuses were fielded out of Water St. The rebuilt Forepaugh-Sells show consisted of 47 railcars. That same year the Ringlings own circus was an 84 car show. The technical and business acumen required to build/repair two major shows out of the same winter quarters is that much more amazing when one considers the Ringlings were also managing the Barnum & Bailey Show out of Bridgeport at the same time.³⁸

The simultaneous management of two large railroad shows at Ringlingville required expanded railroad facilities. The old yard and car shops on the Potter parcel could not possibly handle the volume of painting and repair necessary to field two fleets of railroad cars, so in 1909 the brothers purchased property about a mile east along the south bank of Baraboo River and built a new, much larger car shop. The first section of the building, constructed in the fall of 1908 was 64 by 87 feet and could hold three cars for painting and repairs. Additional sections were built in subsequent years.³⁹



An illustration that accompanied the newspaper's account of the boa constrictor swallowing a child at the winter quarters.

from Circus World



Practicing behind the elephant house, 1904.

from Circus World



Overlooking Water St. circa 1904.

from Circus World



A team of camels pull a parade wagon from the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus down 3rd St. Baraboo, 1911.

from Circus World



Looking across a foot bridge towards Ringlingville after 1904. The building on the left was originally the painting shop and later used to store wagons during the winter. The building on the right was used for various storage and eventually also housed wagons.

from Circus World



Above, paint shop employees pose for the camera circa 1910. from Circus World

Below, railroad car repair shops, circa 1912.

from Circus World

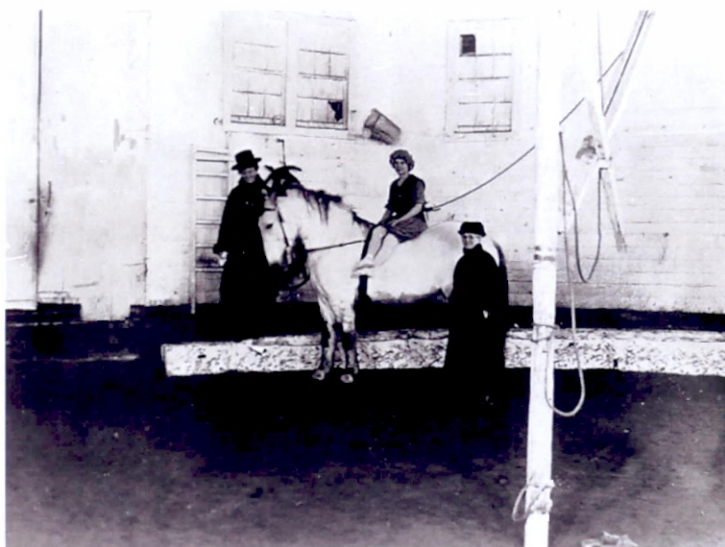


Between 1901 and 1912 the brothers invested over \$35,800 (approximately \$900,000 in 2014 dollars) in Ringlingville.⁴⁰ Projects included a new office, second animal barn (sometimes referred to as the Lewis Building), and a new ring barn in 1901. Three years later major technical improvements were made to the carpenter shop which received new equipment powered by a 12 horsepower Fairbanks-Morse gasoline engine.⁴¹ Three years later in 1904 a new baggage horse barn was added to the grounds.

In 1910 on the south western outskirts of Baraboo at what is today the intersection of Lynn and Case Streets, a large barn capable of housing 75 horses was built. That same year a new 66 by 100 foot paint shop was constructed on the north side of the 200 block of Water St. The paint shop also provided space for the wandering wardrobe department which finally found a permanent home on the second floor of the massive brick building. Isenberg was again the go-to contractor in 1911 when additions to the new paint and wardrobe shop were made. That same year Isenberg expanded the elephant house, "which will increase the capacity of the buildings so that about 50 elephants will be housed here during the winter." The construction was to be completed by November 1st, just in time for the return of the both the Ringling and the Adam Forepaugh shows.⁴² The elephant house was the only structure to include living quarters for the animal keepers. The size and intelligence of elephants required constant attention. Four years later the elephant house was described in detail in *The Billboard*.

"The adjoining 'bull barn,' or elephant house, is as big and roomy as would be expected necessary for the accommodation of such bulky boarders. There is a sunken ring here also, and the big brutes are put through their paces daily, learning new tricks and keeping in practice. Forty fine specimens are quartered here. A dozen or more stand around the edge of the ring awaiting their turn."⁴³

The Ringlings were always improving their Water Street winter quarters. After 1904 most, if not all, of the original 1890 buildings had been replaced and by 1913 could boast 26 structures. Even by 1900 a reporter for *The Billboard* declared, "The winter quarters of the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows are as commodious and substantial as any in existence."⁴⁴



The interior of the ring barn interior sometime after 1901.

from Circus World



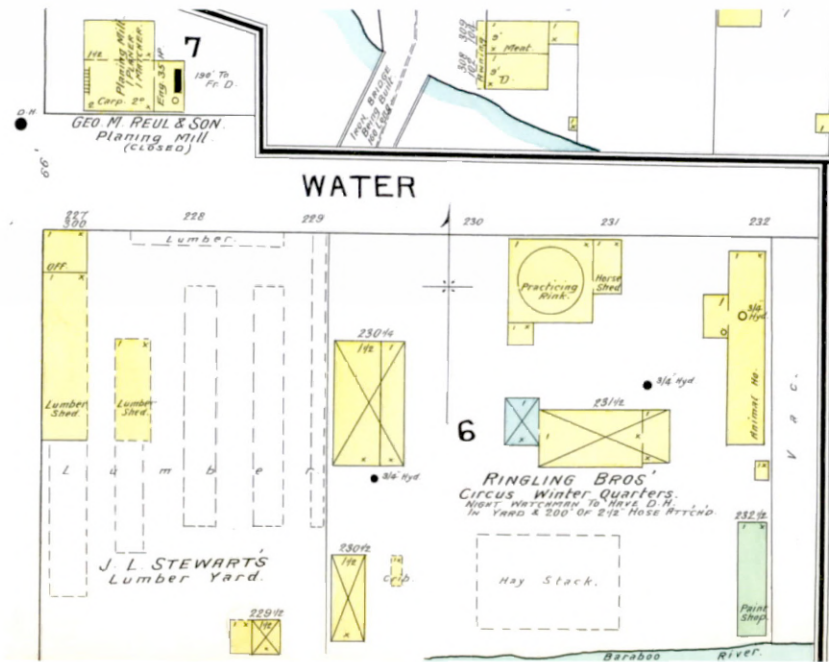
Paint and wardrobe shops, circa 1910.

from Circus World



Wagons, in storage at the "Case Farm" or "Ringling Farm" located at the intersection of Lynn and Case Street. Here the Ringlings maintained several barns housing a large number of their baggage horse stock and stored numerous wagons.

from Circus World

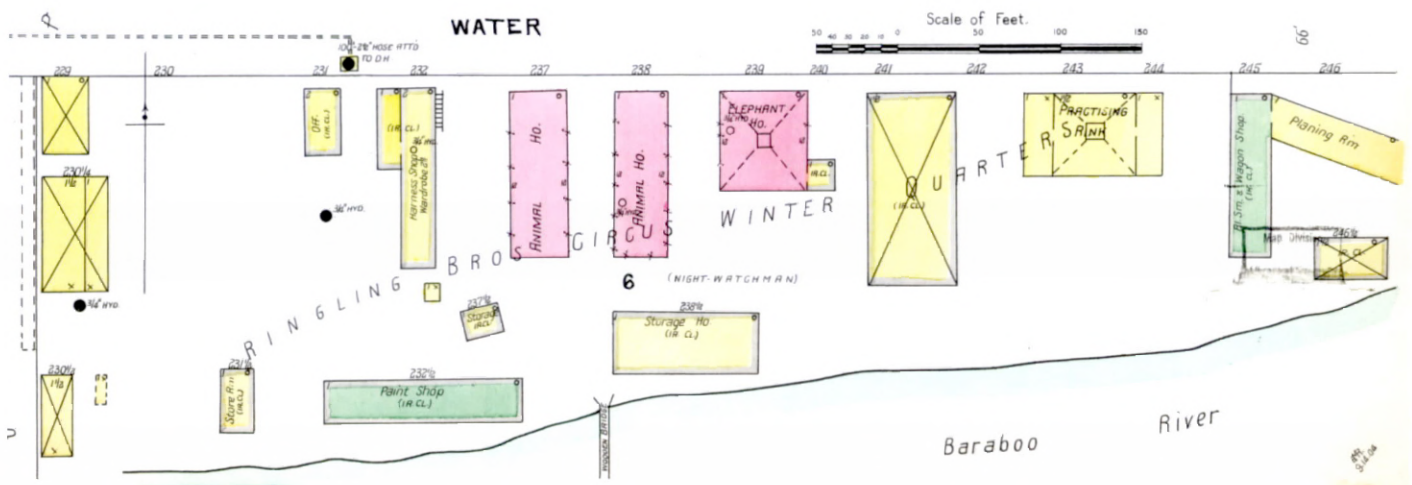
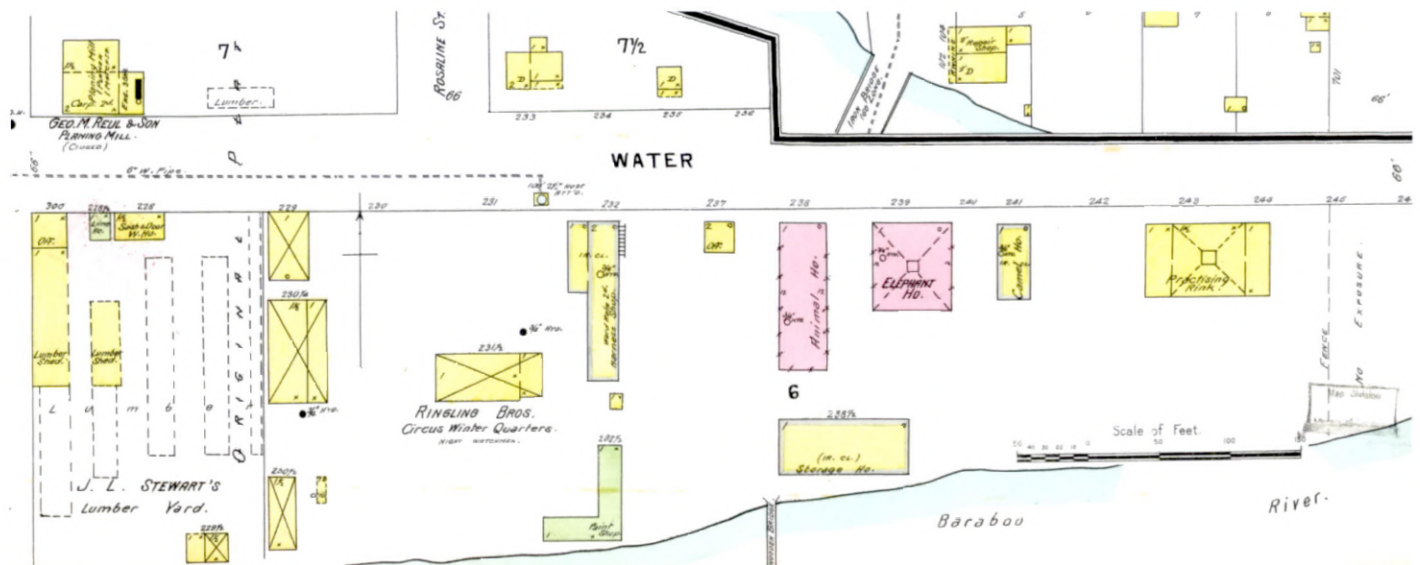


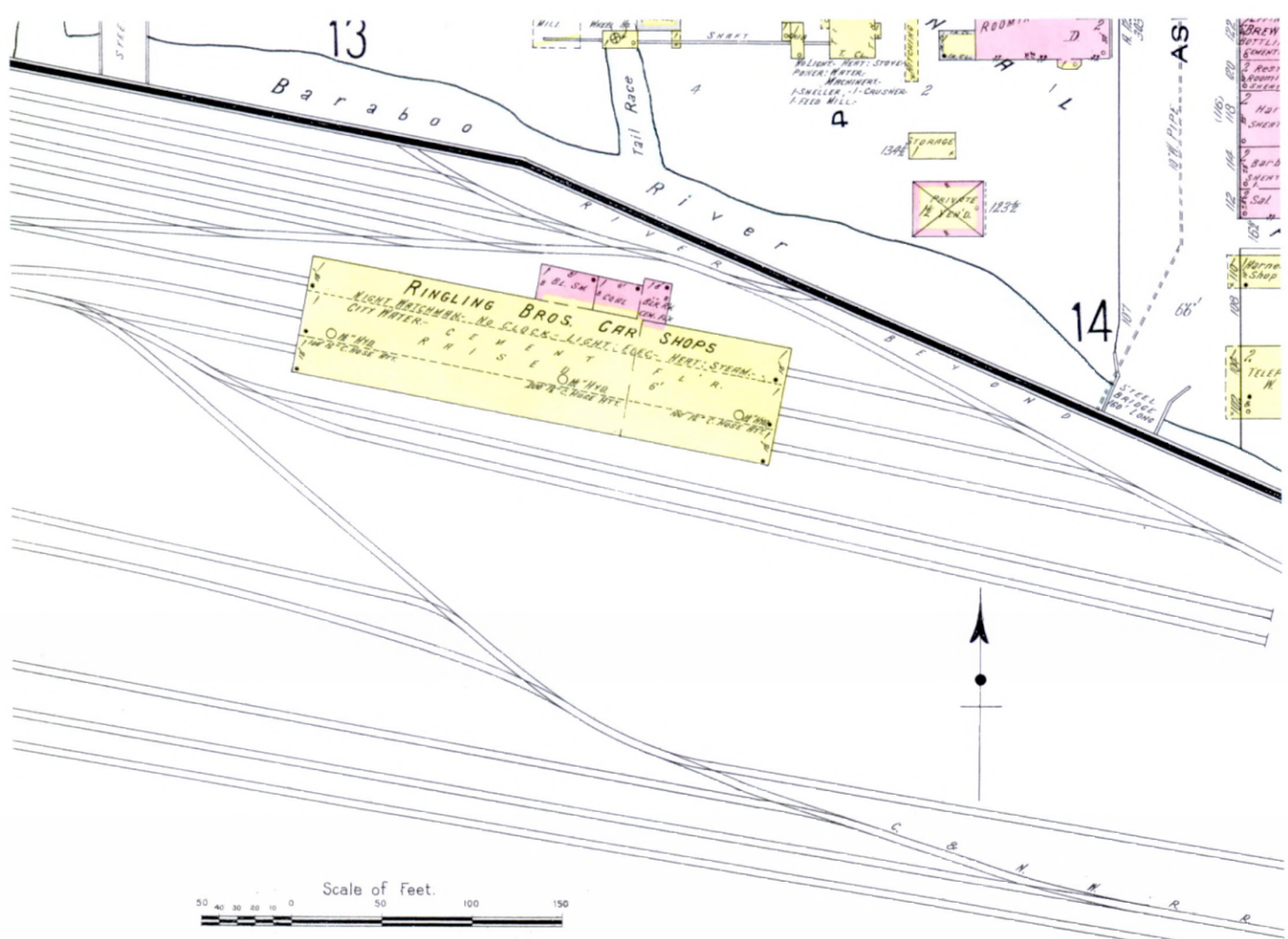
The Sanborn maps (top to bottom this page and the top of the next page) of 1892, 1898, 1904, and 1913 show the development of the Ringlingville buildings along Water Street. By 1913 the only significant structure missing was the Camel Barn built two years later.

Wisconsin Historical Society ID 121257,
ID 121258, ID 121259, and ID 121260

Lower map on next page of the railroad car shops as they appeared in the 1913 Sanborn map.

from the Wisconsin Historical Society, ID121262







An undated panoramic view of the Gollmar Bros. Circus winter quarters.
from Circus World

The Gollmar Bros. Circus

Ringlingville on its own would have been enough to secure Baraboo's reputation as a circus city, but it was not the only winter quarters in town. Just a little under a mile to the west the Gollmar brothers (cousins to the Ringlings and proprietors of their own circus) also built their winter quarters along the banks of the Baraboo River. The Gollmar family had already established themselves in a variety of successful careers before they decided to enter the circus

business. Charles and Jacob were established machinists. Ben and Fred, who also had a business as an undertaker, ran a furniture store. Walter brought "extensive experience" to the enterprise, having already worked for one year in the Ringling wardrobe department.⁴⁵ In 1891 the five brothers banded together and formed the Gollmar Bros. Greatest of American Shows. Unlike their cousins who first had to find an empty shop, Gollmars simply used their old furniture

store in the Gattiker building, at 115 3rd St. to build their first show.⁴⁶ Here, the *Sauk County Democrat* reported the "Gollmar Bros., the new circus men, appear to be among the busiest men in town. They can be seen at their work shop every day (except Sunday) polishing their vehicles and other paraphernalia."⁴⁷

The 1890s saw rapid development at the Gollmar winter quarters. Like the Ringlings, at first their operations were located at various sites around town. In 1891 the Gollmar brothers leased an old stage factory "near the iron bridge in Lyons [West Baraboo]."⁴⁸ Ed Gollmar, who maintained a machine shop on 3rd Ave (today the parking lot for the Sauk County West Square building, and incidentally just across the street from the Moeller Wagon Works), did not follow his brothers into the circus business but did let them use his shop in the winter of 1892 to build "A large and attractive band chariot and other



115 3rd St. once held the Gollmar Furniture store and was one of the several locations around Baraboo where the Gollmar brothers first built their circus.

photo by author



The intersection Lynn and Walnut showing the Ruhland Brewery circa 1900. The Gollmars used a room on the second floor of this building to paint props in the winter of 1892.

from Sauk County Historical Society

wagons." The same winter the family rented the old Schadde photographic gallery, located on the 200 block of Lynn St. across the street from the railroad passenger depot where they repainted equipment from the previous season as well as "retouching other paraphernalia."⁴⁹

Within two years the Gollmars consolidated their operations to the 800 block of 2nd Ave, along the Baraboo River. The new winter quarters would house their animals, include a paint shop and their offices. The site today occupies a stretch of land from roughly the back entrance of Mary Roundtree Park to the 2nd Ave. Bridge. In 1893 a 30 by 80 foot barn, animal house, and several sheds to house wagons were built. A horse barn and new paint shop were added a year later.⁵⁰

Surviving photographs reveal a complex of about 12



Large hay mounds obscure this undated view of the Gollmar Bros. winter quarters.

from Circus World



At right, the intersection today.

photo by Author

buildings. In contrast to Ringlingville, where many of the buildings were constructed of brick and in some cases included two or three floors, all of the buildings at the Gollmar winter quarters were single story simple frame structures, covered with metal sheeting or tar paper. Depending on the year, the winter operations were staffed by at least 10 to 17 men in addition to the brothers themselves. Those that did not own homes in Baraboo sometimes roomed at the expense of the show at the Wisconsin House, a boarding establishment located on the courthouse square, where the Al. Ringling Theatre now stands.⁵¹

Though actual accounts of the Gollmar quarters are scarce, there are a few anecdotal stories such as one re-



Local residents young and old follow elephants of the Ringling Bros. Circus on their daily walk through the east end of Baraboo. This image was taken at the intersection of 2nd and Rosaline.

from Circus World



The Wisconsin House, where many of the winter quarters employees of the Gollmar Bros. Circus boarded.

from the Sauk County Historical Society

laid by Robert Gollmar where the brothers purchased an automobile. As mechanically inclined as they were, the new machine proved a challenge to operate. The car was successfully started but once on the road there was some confusion about how to stop it. With Walter behind the wheel the car dashed uncontrollably along the residential streets of the city to the growing annoyance the neighbors and the local police. Desperate to stop the machine Walter steered the car into the winter quarters and drove it into a tent.⁵²

Like their cousins, the Gollmars sent out their herds of baggage horses to winter at various surrounding farmsteads. In the spring the animals returned to 2nd Ave to be "conditioned for the long summer miles that lay ahead."⁵³ The elephant herds also ambled through the streets. The regular walks through the surrounding residential neighborhoods not only exercised the animals but also prepared them for life on the road as Robert Gollmar explained: "Their feet must be hardened to walking on city streets, and they must learn again to ignore the sights, sounds and smells of the cities."⁵⁴ From time to time the herds of the Gollmars and the Ringlings would encounter each other. The animals apparently ignored one another but the trainers often exchanged hand salutes. Photographic evidence suggest the elephant walks were a popular local attraction regularly drawing curious locals both young and old but Robert Gollmar remembered a more ambivalent reaction: "The people on the streets hurry by, utterly ignoring the whole thing. Baraboo in those days was very blasé, indeed. What was another circus more or less in a city that had several of them?"⁵⁵

Though faded, this image provides a good sense of the rough construction of the Gollmar winter quarters.

from Circus World



The Advance Wagon for the Gollmar Bros. Circus, circa 1900. A metal sided building of the winter quarters can be seen in the background.

from Circus World



Hodgini Circus and the Rooney Training Barn

Baraboo was also the home to many circus employees. The 1895-96 Baraboo City Directory for example contained listings for canvas makers, cooks, animal keepers, musicians, bandwagon drivers, and various department superintendents, all with permanent residences in the city. Whereas it was not uncommon for many performers to remain on the road playing music halls and hitting the vaudeville circuit, others would stay in town and prepare for the next season. Three families are good examples of this, the Hodgins, Rooneys, and Hocums. All three were well established equestrians and acrobats and all were employed at one time or another with both the Ringlings and the Gollmars. Two of the families shared an additional bond through marriage, as Minnie Hodgini was married to Charles Rooney.

Both Albert and Joe Hodgini (their birth name was Hodges) came to Baraboo as performers with the Ringlings in 1908. Here they would perfect their acts, marry, and raise their children including Harriet Hodgini, who

Charles and Minnie Rooney perform together in an open air arena in this undated photograph.

from Circus World



would grow into a successful equestrienne herself, working on a variety of shows including Sells Floto, Miller 101 Ranch, and Hagenbeck Wallace in the 1920s and 1930s. It was at Baraboo that Albert developed various acts including the Great Balkani Troupe which included a young Otto Griebing whom Albert brought over from Germany in 1913. Griebing first learned to ride a horse in Baraboo either at the Ring Barn (on museum grounds) or at an independent training barn owned by Charles Rooney.⁵⁶ If the Hodgins ever owned a house in Baraboo it has yet to be determined. While working for the Ringlings, Albert split his time during the winter months working the vaudeville circuit and returning intermittently to Baraboo to help train new acts.⁵⁷ Rather than own a house it is more likely that the family rented an apartment or stayed with their in-

The Hocum family was another well-known troupe of performers in the early 20th century that hailed from Baraboo. Members of this family performed a variety of acts including bareback riding, dog and pony acts, and tight wire acts. At one time or another, family worked for 11 different circuses including the Gollmar Bros., Norris and Rowe, John Robinson, Campbell Bros., Mighty Haag, and the Floto Shows. This image shows members of the family possibly outside of Baraboo, circa 1900.

from Circus World





A 1913 poster highlighting The Great Balkani Troupe which featured Otto Griebling very early in his circus career.

from Circus World

Below top, the Rooney Training Barn circa 1920.

from Circus World

Below bottom, the Rooney Training Barn, 2015. The building was converted into apartments by 1936.

photo by Author

laws. The Rooneys and Hocums were more settled and bought homes in town both of which still stand. The Rooney house is located at the intersection of East and 6th, the Hocum home can be seen at 515 7th Ave.⁵⁸

In 1915 Albert struck out on his own with Hodgini's Great European Shows, which also operated under the name Hodgini Bros. Combined Railroad Shows. The circus was a two car show and included Jess Adkins, who later owned the Cole Bros. Circus in the 1930s, as the advance agent. The show had no wagons, "the parade has been dispensed with, for Mr. Hodgini is convinced that the American people, like those in Europe, prefer a high class, pleasing performance and less glitter and tinsel."⁵⁹ The show ran for a little over a year, performing through the 1915 season and into early 1916. The small one ring show ranged the Midwest with performance dates in Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin, including a show at Baraboo.⁶⁰ Just where the circus based itself when in Baraboo is a mystery, though the close association between the Hodgini and Rooney families makes it plausible that they practiced out of the Rooney Training Barn which still stands as an apartment building today, on 7th St.



COMING SOON!
HODGINI BROS.
COMBINED RAILROAD SHOWS
 THE ECLIPSE OF ALL TENTED AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISES



New Features New Displays New Innovations
NEW IDEAS NEW METHODS

We come to your city on our own private railway cars, bringing all that is New, Novel and Interesting in the arenic world

THE ORIGINAL
MISS DAISY

The MOST beautiful, intrepid, graceful, and accomplished lady rider in the world. This phenomenal rider has won the highest encomiums from the entire press of Europe ever accorded to any bareback rider, and has appeared before the nobility and princely patrons of the circus in Russia, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, England, Italy and Spain.

EVERYWHERE PROCLAIMED THE CHAMPION OF HIGH-ART EQUESTRIANISM



A SUPERBLY ENTERTAINING PROGRAM OF THRILLING AND AMAZING ACTS
 Past Graduates of Equestrianism, Animal Education, Acrobatic Gymnasts, Aerialists, Contortionists, Trick Riders, Wonder Workers and Specialties

A LARGE TROUPE OF EDUCATED PONIES




WONDERFUL TRICKS!
 Endowed with Human Intelligence. Surpassing the Best Ever Seen. Entirely Different From All Others.
EDUCATED TO A MARVELOUS DEGREE OF EXCELLENCE!

LADIES AND CHILDREN ARE ESPECIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND THE AFTERNOON PERFORMANCE. EVERY COURTESY WILL BE EXTENDED TO THEM

CLEAN, DRY, COMFORTABLE SEATS FOR ALL

REMEMBER the DAY and DATE MAKE THIS A HOLIDAY—LET INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE PAUSE FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY GRASP THIS GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

FREE OUTSIDE EXHIBITION Before Each Performance

WILL EXHIBIT AT

2 Performances Daily at **2 & 8 P. M.** Doors Open 1 Hour Earlier

READ THE OTHER SIDE 1915

The end of the Circus City

In 1916 while still on the road, the Gollmar brothers abruptly sold their show to James Patterson. The equipment and menagerie went into winter quarters at Peola, Kansas.⁶¹ Two years later at the end of the 1918 performance season, the Ringling Bros. Circus did not return to Baraboo. The decision to combine the Ringling-Barnum titles and to relocate to Bridgeport, Connecticut has been well documented, most notably by Jerry Apps in his book *Ringlingville* and in a recent article by Fred Dahlinger published in *Bandwagon* in 2014, and will not be discussed here.⁶² Rather, it is important to note that in a three year period Baraboo had lost all of its circuses. The Hodgini circus may have been too small to have had an impact on the town but the back to back departure of both the Ringling and Gollmar shows had a significant impact on the city and consequently the surrounding area of Sauk County. The closure of two winter quarters operations with all of their combined leases, employees (Ringling was the largest seasonal employer in the county at the time), and local purchases were a significant blow to the community. But it was only the beginning. The end of the World War I meant the end of wartime contracts for the local textile mills which in turn meant more layoffs. Finally in 1920 the C&NW Railroad reduced its operations at the Baraboo rail yard. The collective loss of so many jobs led many to leave town. In 1910 the city boasted a population of 6,324. Ten years later only 5,538 were listed in the U.S. Census rolls. The closure of the circus winter quarters did not, on its own, put Baraboo into an economic slump but their departure marked the beginning of a rapid decline for the city that put the community into a depression 10 years before the Wall Street crash of 1929.⁶³

There was a brief resurgence of circus activity in 1924 when former Equestrian Director for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey John Agee developed, in coordination with the Ringling's attorney John M. Kelley, the Fun on the Farm Circus. The show was based out of Baraboo and most likely framed out at Kelley's farmstead which is approximately at the intersection of Draper St. and Winnebago Circle near the Baraboo High School. The circus had several novel characteristics. It had no street parade, no wagons, it performed in the open air, and was a show with a message; "Do not buy oleo margarine!" The Fun on the Farm Circus was but a small part of the long standing "Oleo

A herald for the Hodgini Bros. Combined Railroad Shows, 1915.
 from *Circus World*

Wars" that raged in Wisconsin from 1895 through the late 1960s. Since the introduction of oleo margarine, farmers throughout Wisconsin feared that their livelihood and way of life was under threat. The local politicians agreed and for a time the use of oleo was outlawed and punishable by severe fines. In the mid-1920s Kelley, who was also involved in state politics and worked for local dairy interests, partnered with Agee to create a show to promote dairy products and to combat the immoral use of oleo. A banner hanging directly behind the performance ring declared that for the all-American girl "the road to better health and a beautiful complexion was "by using more milk, butter, and cheese." The show played almost exclusively in Wisconsin towns, most notably at fairgrounds, and was aimed directly at farmers. But the venture was a brief one, and by 1925 Agee had moved on and the show was discontinued.⁶⁴

As the Ringlings' attorney experimented with his own show, the old winter quarters along the Baraboo River continued to fade into obscurity. The various heirs of the Ringling brothers retained joint ownership of the property and through the 1920s rented the buildings to an assortment of local businesses. Some buildings were used as an egg hatchery, an International Harvester dealership, and auto wrecking and repair companies while others were used for hay storage and warehouses for whole sugar.⁶⁵

Despite the varied usage, some of the old buildings were still filled with relics of their former glory. When the Ringlings abandoned the Water St. shops they left behind tools and machinery, wagons, props, wardrobe, and business records. The Swan Bandwagon for example, remained in storage there until 1927 when it was finally carted away by George Christy three years after purchasing it from Charles Ringling.

The abandoned quarters became popular stomping grounds for local children who snuck into the abandoned buildings and played with the decaying relics. Wisconsin historian and writer Jerry Apps recorded the memories of one longtime resident who as a young boy crawled into the elephant house with some friends and tossed spears at dried out lumps of elephant dung. Other children hung out in the old wardrobe department. One young girl was such a regular visitor that the caretaker let her take a number of the costumes home, which were recently donated to Circus World.

Local business entrepreneurs Adolph Andro, a local judge and former city mayor, and Ferdinand Effinger pur-

Fun on the Farm Circus herald, 1924.

from Circus World

JOHN M. KELLEY
JOHN R. AGEE
 PRESENT

FUN ON THE FARM CIRCUS

Nothing Like It Under The Sun

**18 WORLD WONDER TRAINED PERFORM-
 ING HORSES. Agee's Marvelous Silo Act**

Horses leap into elevated silos and perform daring, dangerous feats never before accomplished. See the wonderful horses, Country Gentleman and King Woodford, in thrilling performances and classic dances—see the gorgeous gaudy number of 8 horses and 8 riders.

**Roman Standing Races,
 Chariot Races**

New, Big, Thrilling Acts Never Before Presented!

An Absolutely All New Show

A perspective on Country Life, revealing and inspiring in Floods of Fun a happy solution of Farm Problems. It's a show with a big human appeal.

**MARVELOUS TRAINED PERFORMING BULLS — THE RIDING BULL
 THE GREEN BULL — THE STATUE BULL — THE SWINGING BULL**

KING JESS — The Statue Bull

The supreme classic in Trained Bull—Marvelous—Amazing—Beautiful. In one act he is a contortionist, in the next he displays grace, beauty and art. He presents varied, vivid, classic living pictures of posing bull.

BILL—The World's Greatest Daredevil Rosin-back Purebred Holstein Riding Bull!

Not in all history has there been a riding act like this. He does the unbelievable.

SENSATIONAL THRILLING

YOU WILL LAUGH and LEARN at "FUN ON THE FARM"

AN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

"Fun On The Farm" is more than a show. It is an Educational Service. It is a combination circus, sideshow and agricultural college.—Minneapolis Tribune.

For the first time in history Fun On The Farm comes as big entertainment, featuring an educational program in the solution of Farm Problems. It is the first movement in history that successfully brings together the family of the farm and the family of the city. In Fun On The Farm John M. Kelley presents in a novel way, through illustrations and clown pantomime, his constructive program in farming and dairying.

20 Clown Acts CLOWNS Clown Acts 20

Clown One—Clown Baseball—Clown Stockjudging—Clown Ballroom Trip—Clown Novelties—The Clown Fund—New, Novel, Thrilling, Side-Splitting Fun Makers—Women laugh till they cry; children shout with delight; farmers and business men laugh themselves back into childhood days.

ALL TOGETHER BOYS! WE'RE ALL DRESSED UP AND KNOW WHERE TO GO —

2 DAYS ONLY AFTERNOON AND NIGHT

AURORA 15

FAIR GROUNDS AND

AUG. 16

OVER

1924

chased the entirety of the abandoned winter quarters from the surviving Ringling heirs in June 1932. The two men intended to redevelop the property and through the next decade sold the buildings off piecemeal.⁶⁶ Almost as soon as the property was purchased Andro was beset by individuals seeking relics. In the fall of 1932 one such collector, Madison attorney Sverre Braathen, reached out to the judge inquiring if there were any items left in the old winter quarters. Andro replied, "Since I purchased the property most of the circus relics have either been given away or sold. You

are welcome to anything that is left for your collection."⁶⁷

Andro was just happy to see the stuff go and was constantly urging Braathen to take more materials.

"I recently sold the lower end of Ringlingville. Do you remember the circus wagons and old hacks that we had stored there? At this particular time I would like to dispose of them. I will have to vacate the building where they are stored within a week or two. I thought perhaps you and some of the other circus fans might be interested in these old relics.



John Agee stands in the center ring during a performance of Fun on the Farm Circus.

from Circus World

The little Santa Claus wagon would top off your cottage [at Lake Waubesa near Madison] at the lake very nicely.”⁶⁸

There was always an underlying threat that the materials might be destroyed as Braathen indicated in one of his many replies to the judge, “I at least took some of the stuff off your hands and am hoping that you don’t burn it until I make a couple of more trips over your way to haul back another couple of car loads.”⁶⁹ The two men retained a cordial relationship for many years and bit by bit the Madison attorney preserved the remnants of the Ringling business records which now reside at the Milner Library at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois.

Today much of Ringlingville has been preserved as a part of Circus World though several sites still remain outside of the holdings of the museum. The 1910 paint and wardrobe shop is now a banquet hall. The Ringling Hotel constantly changes hands but is still standing. Other buildings once leased by the brothers still remain, though some including the former office located at the intersection of 1st and Ash burned long ago. There is little to suggest that there was once a car shops at Potters field, let alone the huge C&NW railroad facility, but the Ringling Car Shops are owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society and serves as a storage facility for Circus World.

Less is known about the Gollmar Bros. winter quarters after the show closed. The family retained the land of the old winter quarters for several years, possibly using the site to develop and manufacture a special line of gas stoves. By the fall of 1921 the paint shop, office, and lands had been sold.⁷⁰ Despite the sale, the area was still marked (perhaps due to poor timing) as Gollmar Bros. land in the 1922



Ringlingville long after the departure of the Ringlings, circa 1930.

from Circus World



The Camel Barn, built in 1915, and one of the last buildings constructed at Ringlingville, seen here abandoned in the 1930s.

from Circus World

map of Baraboo. The construction of the now abandoned circus buildings were never of the quality as Ringlingville and the area easily transitioned into a residential neighborhood. By the late 1930s nothing was left to suggest that a circus was once based there.

Although the Moeller brothers continued to build wagons through the 1920s for other shows such as Al G. Barnes, Sun Bros., Christy Bros., Sparks, and Dode Fisk, they too suffered a serious reduction of business after 1918. Fortunately during the years the brothers made circus wagons they also continued their original business of building and repairing carriages and other wagons. As a result they were in a better position to weather the loss of two major regular clients. With



A battered and forlorn baggage wagon on the old Ringling farm (today referred to as the Case farm) outside of town, October 23, 1936. The caption on the back of this photo states that this is the last circus wagon in Baraboo.

from Circus World

the coming of the automobile much of their trade turned to auto and tire repair. The Moellers remained in business until the late 1940s but two years after the death of Corwin in 1946, Henry, Jr. retired. With the closure of the Moeller shop the last vestige of the once mighty circus industry that dominated Baraboo was gone.

But as one chapter was closing another was just beginning. Around the same time the Moeller shop closed its doors a joint effort that included John M. Kelley, local businessmen, and the Wisconsin Historical Society was taking shape with the goal to establish a circus museum in Baraboo. The natural location for such a museum was the old Ringling winter quarters. The first

From the mid-1920s through the mid-1960s the car shops were owned by the North Western Refrigerator Line Co. and used to repair and manufacture railroad refrigeration cars. The site was acquired by Circus World Museum in the 1960s where it has served as an off-site storage facility and at one time location of the wagon restoration shop.

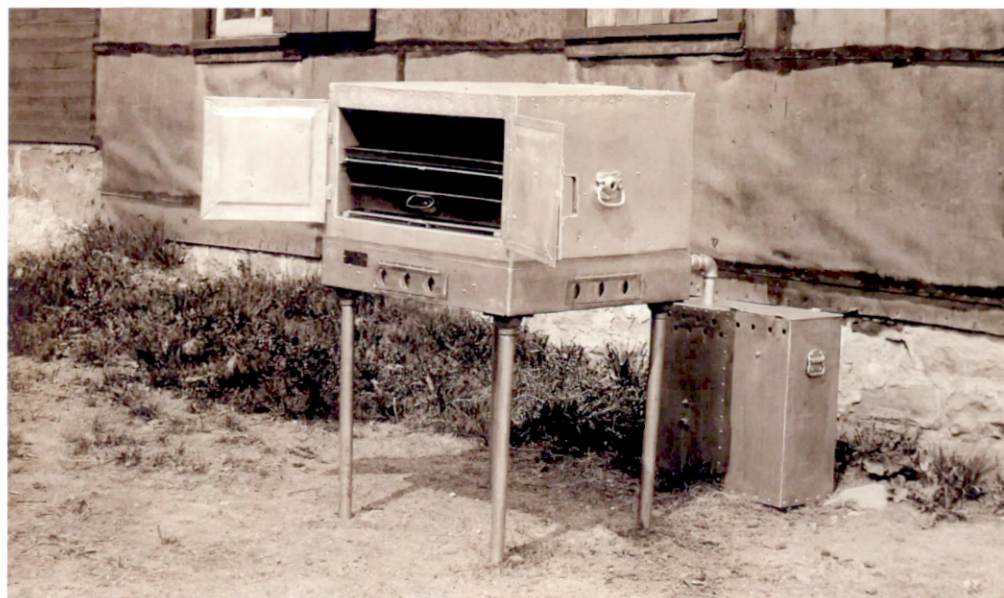
from Circus World



building to be preserved was the Ring Barn, purchased by the City of Baraboo in 1954. Over the next 50 years seven more original Ringlingville structures were acquired. These buildings can be seen today at Circus World where they remain as a monument not just to the Ringling brothers but to the American circus community to be preserved for future generations to view, study, and enjoy.

Though the Ringlings left in 1918, in many ways the circus never really left Baraboo. It is ingrained in the iden-

tity of the town and even today it is easy to visualize Water St. filled with baggage horses, elephants, camels, wagons and the general hustle and bustle of winter activity. The Ringlings, the Moellers, the Gollmars, the countless other families that remained and are buried here, a theater and mansions that bear the Ringling name, all harken to a collective legacy of the many circus communities that once called this proud city home. Baraboo has been and always will be associated with the circus. **Bw**



At left, an example of a Gollmar Vapor Stove, circa 1917. This image was most likely taken at the old Gollmar winter quarters. Note the tar paper construction of the building.

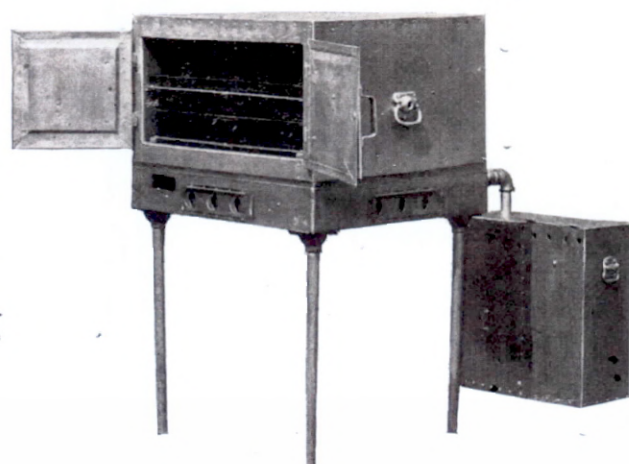
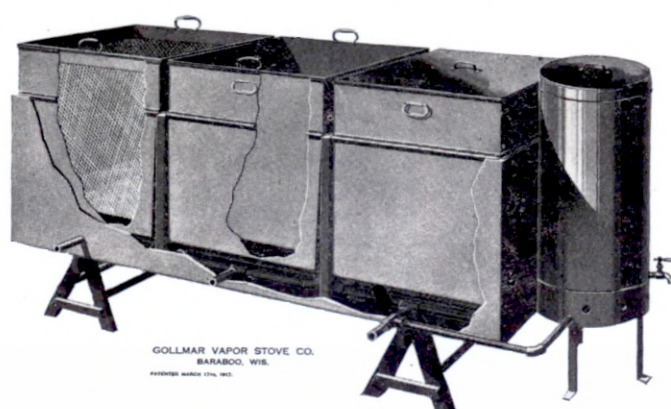
from Circus World

Below, the letter head for the Gollmar Vapor Stove Co.

from Circus World

GOLLMAR VAPOR STOVE CO.

BARABOO, WIS.



MANUFACTURERS OF

Out-Door Gasoline Vapor Ranges and Cookers

Patented March 27, 1917

Baraboo, Wis.,191.

Endnotes

1. Ringling Alf. T. 1893. *Route Book, Ringling Bros.* 'World's Greatest Shows Season of 1893. Buffalo: The Courier Company, Show Printers, p 40.
2. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), April 7, 1892.
3. Ringling, *Route Book, Ringling Bros.* 1893, p 40.
4. Gollmar, Robert H. 1965. *My Father Owned a Circus.* Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, p 95.
5. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), April 21, 1892.
6. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin) May 8, 1890; Kasiska, William, "Tour of City" document found in "Baraboo Winter Quarters" Vertical File, Robert L. Parkinson Library.
7. Ringling, *Route Book, Ringling Bros.* 1893, p 40.
8. These are Ringling Bros. Worlds Greatest Shows, Gollmar Bros. Circus, John Robinson Circus, Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus, Hodgini Bros. Circus, and Fun on the Farm Circus. A seventh circus, not included in this article but also based in Baraboo in the 1960s, was Deppe's Country Classic Circus.
9. An excellent overview of the history of the Ringling brothers and how they developed their circus can be found in Apps, Jerold W. 2005. *Ringlingville USA: the stupendous story of seven siblings and their stunning circus success.* Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press.
10. *Ford's Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), May 3, 1884.
11. Ringling, Alfred T. 1900. *Life story of the Ringling brothers, illustrated; humorous incidents, thrilling trials, many hardships, and ups and downs, telling how the boys built a circus, and showing the true road to success.* Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, p 173.
12. *The Baraboo Republic* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), April 20, 1887.
13. *Ibid.*, Nov. 30, 1887.
14. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 3, 1889.
15. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 23, 1890 and Nov. 3, 1892; 1892 Sanborn Map.
16. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 17, 1889.
17. *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1889.
18. Western Historical Co., Chicago, pub. 1880. *The history of Sauk County, Wisconsin, containing an account of settlement, growth, development and resources ... biographical sketches ... the whole preceded by a history of Wisconsin.* Chicago: Western historical Co., p 504.
19. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), May 12, 1891.
20. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Mar 3, 1892. The location of this store is an educated guess. Peck had a store located at the intersection of Ash and Water St, (now occupied by Gem City Saloon), but was abandoned by 1892-see Ward, Joseph. 2010. *Baraboo 1850-2010; Chronology of the Growth of the Commercial & Retail Districts* (5 Vols.). Available online through the Baraboo Public Library at <http://www.baraboopubliclibrary.org/baraboo-1850-2010-chronology-growth-commercial-retail-districts>. Vol. 2 p 21 and Vol. 3 entry for 214 1st St.
21. The 1885 Sanborn Map notes the location of a 3 story building at the corner of Bridge (modern day Ash) and Water Streets. Hoyt's mill (probably a reference to the Baraboo Roller Mills owned by Warren McFetridge and E. R. Hoyt was located about a block west down water street on or near 126 Water St.
22. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Nov. 20, 1890.
23. *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1916.
24. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Nov. 20, 1890; Ward, *Baraboo 1850-1910*, Vol. 3 entry for 506-508 Oak St.
25. Ward, *Baraboo 1850-1910*, Vol. 2, p 4; Huhn, Sherry, *Ringlingville Animal Houses; Baraboo, Wisconsin*, unpublished report dated July 19, 1996. On file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library.
26. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Nov. 17, 1892.
27. Memo, presumably written by Leonard Roser, September 14, 1959. "Baraboo Winter Quarters" Vertical File, Robert L. Parkinson Library; Ringling Bros. Circus Winter Quarters; Ringling, Alf T. 1894. *Beneath the White Tents*, Buffalo: The Courier Company, Show Printers, p 19.
28. Ringling, *Beneath the White Tents*, p 19.
29. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Sept. 16, 1897.
30. *Billboard*, December 15, 1900; Huhn, *Ringlingville Animal Houses; Baraboo, Wisconsin*.

31. Parkinson, Bob, "John Robinson Circus" *Bandwagon*, Vol. 6, No 2. March-April 1962, p 8.
32. Goc, Michael J. 1990. *Many a fine harvest: Sauk County, 1840-1990*. [Baraboo, Wis.]: Sauk County Historical Society, p 110.
33. *Billboard*, Mar 21, 1914; *Baraboo Republic* Jan 29, 1890.
34. *The Saint Paul Globe* (Saint Paul, Minnesota), Mar 2, 1893; *The Hawaiian Star*, (Honolulu, Hawaii), May 2, 1893.
35. *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, Kansas) Sun, May 7, 1893.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Pfening, Fred, Jr. "The Final Years, Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Big United Shows: 1910 and 1911 Seasons Part 1," *Bandwagon*, May-June 1995, p 4.
38. *Ibid.*, p 4.
39. Braathen to Fox Nov. 7, 1964, "Baraboo Winter Quarters" Vertical File, Robert L. Parkinson Library; *Baraboo Republic* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Jan 26, 1893; *Baraboo News* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 7, 1909; *Baraboo Republic* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 7, 1909; *Baraboo News* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Nov. 4, 1909.
40. Based on inflation calculator found at <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1860-dollars-to-2014-dollars>. The valuation varies between 1900 and 1912. The approximate value of \$900,000 is an estimated middle value. Costs included: \$1,000 for the "headquarters" – a possible reference to the office, \$7,000 for the ring barn, \$7,000 for the animal house (in 1901); 4,500 for the baggage horse barn and sheds (in 1904); 2,500 for the new railroad car shops (in 1909); 7,000 for additions to the railroad car shops, 2,000 for an annex to the elephant house, 5,800 the new paint shop, and 2,000 for the horse barn on Lynn Ave (in 1910); 3000 for the wardrobe department and 1000 for the Farm house-probably on Lynn Ave (in 1912) Newspaper articles relating to the construction of the new buildings and their costs can be found at: *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Jan 9, 1902, Jan 12, 1902, and Dec. 11, 1902 for construction costs in 1901; *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Jan 12, 1905 for construction costs in 1904; *Show World*, Sept. 24, 1910, p 21 and Sauk; *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin) Oct. 13, 1910, Feb. 2, 1911 for costs for construction in 1910; *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Feb. 2, 1912 for construction costs in 1912.
41. *The Baraboo Republic* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Jan 1, 1904.
42. *Baraboo Republic* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Sept. 15, 1910.
43. *Billboard*, Mar 21, 1914.
44. *Billboard*, Dec. 15, 1900, p 18.
45. Gollmar, My Father Owned a Circus, p 19; *Ringling Brothers. 1890. Ringling Brothers' United Monster Shows Menagerie and Museum Route Book, Season of 1890*. Cincinnati: Donaldson Lith. Co, p 9.
46. Ward, *Baraboo 1850-1910*, Vol. 4 entry for 115 3rd St.
47. *Sauk County Democrat*, (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Mar 19, 1891.
48. *Sauk County Democrat*, (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 8, 1891.
49. The location of Ed Gollmar's Shop is listed in the 1903-04 Baraboo City Director, The location of the Schadde Photo gallery is documented in Ward, *Baraboo 1850-1910*, Vol. 3, p 18.
50. *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, Wisconsin), Oct. 19, 1893 and Oct. 25, 1894.
51. The Wisconsin House is mentioned in Gollmar Business Records, Vol 13, 1902, p 300; a listing of the employees of the Gollmar winter quarters for 1904-05 can be found in 1904 Gollmar Bros. Business Records, Vol 17. Vol 20 listed 10 men on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library.
52. Gollmar, *My Father Owned a Circus*, 96-97.
53. *Ibid.*, 95.
54. *Ibid.*, 96.
55. *Ibid.*, 96.
56. Tabor, Bob, "The Hodgini Family," *White Tops*, Vol. 34, No 3, May-June 1961, 19; Draper, John Daniel, "The Riding Hodgini Family," *Bandwagon*, May June 1993, p 5.
57. Dubuque, Berry L. "The Original Miss Daisy" *Bandwagon*, Nov.-Dec. 1979 p 27.
58. The home of E. V. Hocum is listed on page 47 of the *Baraboo City Directory 1910-1911*.
59. *The Osage County Chronicle* (Burlingame, Kansas), Aug 26, 1915. Additional news articles regarding the show can be found in *The Daily Herald* (Chicago), May 14, 1915, and *The Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Oklahoma), Sept. 14, 1915.
60. Hodgini Bros. Circus, 1915, Route Sheets, Robert L. Parkinson Library; *The Checota Times* (Checotah, Oklahoma), Sept.. 24, 1915.

61. *Janesville Daily Gazette* (Janesville, Wisconsin), Nov. 11, 1916; *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin), Oct. 31, 1916.
62. See Apps, *Ringlingville* and Dahlinger, Fred, Jr., "From Snowballs to Baseballs: How the Ringling Circus Went from Baraboo to Sarasota," *Bandwagon*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2014.
63. Goc, *Many a Fine Harvest*, 110-111.
64. A good overview of the Oleo Wars can be found in Strey, Gerry "The "Oleo Wars": Wisconsin's Fight over the Demon Spread," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. 85, No. 1 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 2-15. Information regarding the history of Fun on the Farm Circus can be found in Draper, Daniel, "Early Equestrians of the Ringling Bros. Circus: John Agee" *Bandwagon*, Sept.- Oct. 2000, p 32-33 and CWM Mss 9 John M. Kelley Papers on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library. The location of the Kelley farm can be found in the north east corner of section 36 of Baraboo Township, and seen in detail on the plat map for the west part of the City of Baraboo 1922 Plat Map of Sauk County. A modern map of the same area can be found online at saukgis.co.sauk.wi.us.
65. 1927 Sanborn Map.
66. Abstract Fullmer Property, Animal House and Horse Barn. Unidentified news clipping "Ringlings' Property in Baraboo is Sold," 1932, in "Wisconsin-Baraboo (1908-1969)" Vertical File, Robert L. Parkinson Library.
67. Andro to Braathen, Oct. 27, 1932, Braathen Papers, Milner Library, Illinois State University.
68. Andro to Braathen May 10, 1935 Braathen Papers, Milner Library, Illinois State University.
69. Braathen to Arndro Oct. 14, 1933 Braathen Papers, Milner Library, Illinois State University.
70. Gollmar Bros. Circus Business Records 1992-1916, Box 7, Vol. 9, pp 71. The Gollmar Vapor Stove was patented in March 1917. A surviving stationary on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library contains the form date of "191_" suggesting the stove was produced in the late teens leading to the speculation that it was produced at the old winter quarters site.



Gollmar Bros. winter quarters site, 2015.

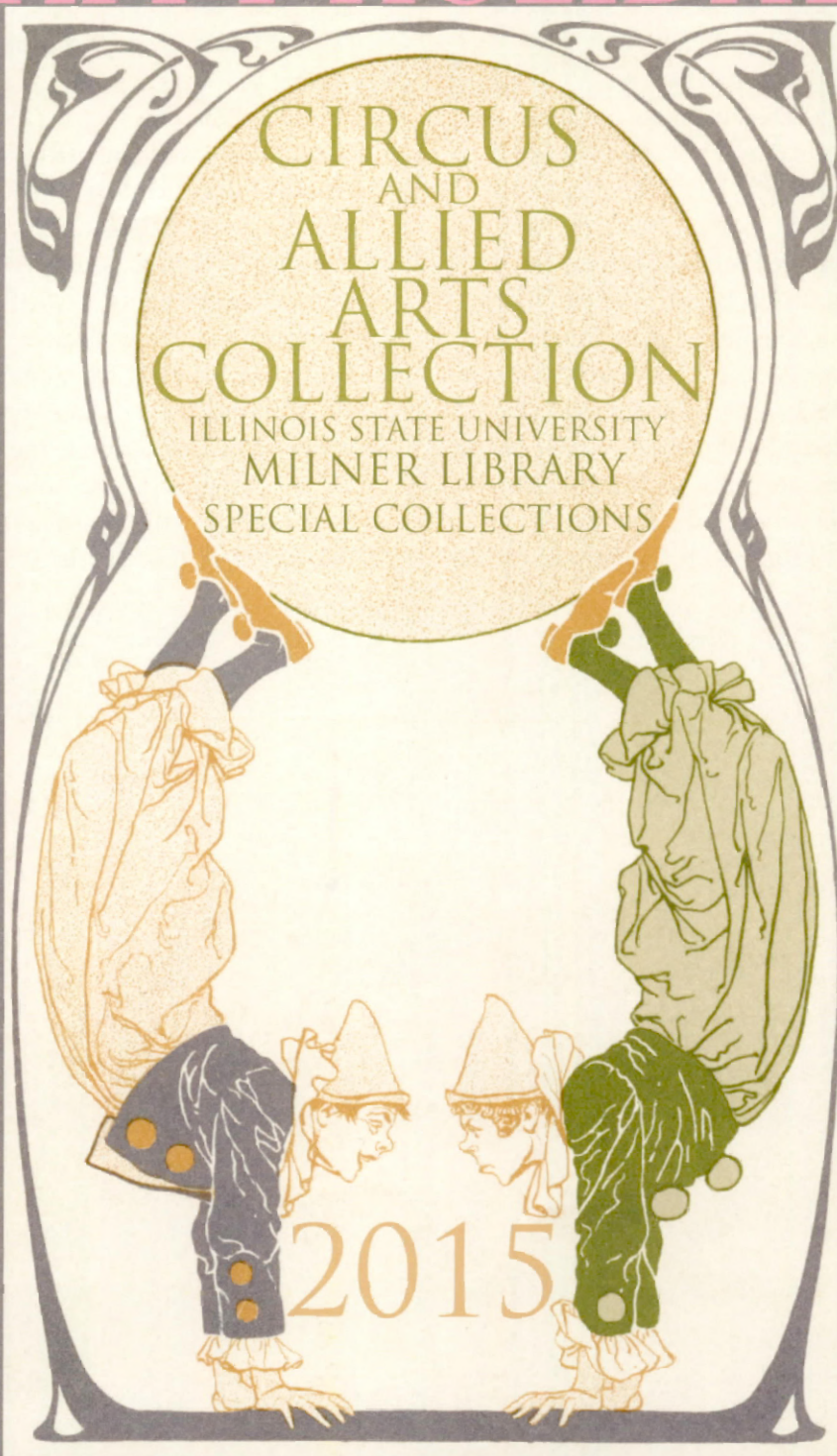
photo by author



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

CIRCUS
AND
ALLIED
ARTS
COLLECTION

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
MILNER LIBRARY
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



2015



MAUREEN BRUNSDALE STEVE GOSSARD MARK SCHMITT

milnerspc@illinoisstate.edu

309-438-2871

Santa gives it a big thumbs-up!

He knows a place for you to share your love of circus with others that have the same interest. Just join the Circus Fans Association of America!

*Not sure? You can get a free copy of CFA's official magazine, **White Tops**, and see all that the members are doing to enjoy and promote circus around the country and internationally.*

Just email <whitetops@midohio.twcbc.com> or call 614-261-0454 with your request.

To join, visit <circusfans.org> and click the "Join Us" button or return the application on the wrapper of your magazine. And by the way...

...Have a Circus Holiday Season and New Year to Come!

Billy Martin's

like us on
facebook

Happy Holidays

*From Billy & Angela Martin
and everyone at the COLE ALL-STAR CIRCUS*

WWW.BILLYMARTINCIRCUS.COM

Residence of Mr. Al. Ringling, Baraboo, Wis.



Circus Ring Castles

The Baraboo Homes of the Ringlings

by Paul Wolter,

Executive Director, Sauk County Historical Society

Two views of the Al. Ringling Mansion in Baraboo.

Sauk County Historical Society





A discussion of historic residential architecture might seem an unlikely topic in a publication devoted to the circus and its nomadic people, but it can be argued that even a nomad needs a place to lay his head. And though that place might be a tent, a rail car or a hotel for most of the year, the remaining time must be spent somewhere. And that somewhere is often, especially to the nomad's family, preferably in something substantial – like a house. Circus people are after all normal people with the same ambitions as people whose line of work allows them to reside near their place of employment. For circus folk though the ambition of owning a permanent dwelling is often tempered by the time spent on the road for much of the year.

This was the situation which confronted the Ringling brothers for the first fifteen years of their circus life. Every year from 1884 to 1898 when the season ended and the Ringling circus returned to Baraboo, the brothers would each come back to rented quarters. Often this was a room at the Warren Hotel until marriage prompted them to upgrade to a rented house which provided a little more breathing room and privacy. This approach to domesticity was

not only pragmatic but also allowed revenue to be spent on expanding the circus, including constructing buildings for the growing numbers of animals which also had to be housed for the winter. After fifteen years of this arrangement, however, pragmatism and practicality would finally be overcome by a different set of realities.

The first of these was that by 1899 their serious rival, Barnum & Bailey, was in Europe for an extended stay. This took some of the pressure off to always invest more into the circus. Also, the depression in America that had started in 1893 was over by this point. Another wake-up call might have been the death of August Ringling, Sr. The patriarch of the family had died in a rented house in Baraboo in February of 1898. The fact that the father of five of the richest men in the city had died in a house that wasn't his own must have stung the consciences of at least some of the brothers. Or maybe it brought to mind their own mortality. Whatever the influence of their father's situation at death, their mother would not be left in a similar situation.

The biggest reason though for building permanent houses could be the fact that, by 1899, four of the brothers

The Warren Hotel in downtown Baraboo often provided winter housing for the Ringling brothers, especially when they were still single.

Sauk County Historical Society



had been married for some time. By that year Al. was forty-six years old and had been married to Eliza "Lou" Morris since at least 1890.¹ Gus. Ringling was forty-four years old and had been married to Anna Hurley since 1883. Alf. T. was thirty-five years old and had been married to Adella Mae Andrews for eight years. Charles was thirty-four and had been married to Edith Conway since 1889. Most of the wives traveled with the circus in the early years, but as the circus route became longer and especially as children came along, the desire to stay in one place was a strong one. Rented quarters above downtown shops gave way to rented homes which in turn surely must have fed a desire to have a "home of one's own."

The convergence of ability, desire and capability came together for the Ringling family in the spring of 1899. On March 1 of that year *The Baraboo Republic* printed the following short article in its local interest column: "Carl Isenberg has purchased the corner lot of W. A. Warren on Ash and Eighth streets for Chas. Ringling. Mr. Ringling will erect a fine residence on his new possession during the coming summer. There is not a nicer location in the city than this. It is hoped that the other members of the Ringling Bros.' Show will see fit to put up fine residences in the near future."² The last line was aimed at Charles Ringling's six brothers, none of whom owned a house, let alone had built one, even though they had been calling Baraboo "home" for fifteen years. What the author of the article did not know was that Charles had not officially purchased anything yet and that older brother Alf. T. Ringling had already purchased two lots in the city a few days earlier. Al. and Gus were about to do the same.

On February 29, 1899 Alf. T. Ringling purchased two lots at the northeast corner of Oak and Tenth Street from local builder Carl Isenberg and his wife Ida.³ Isenberg would also be the contractor for the house to be built there. In fact, Isenberg was the preferred contractor, along with his brother George Isenberg, for almost all of the Ringling winter quarter buildings. The Oak and Tenth Street spot chosen by Alf. T. Ringling was on a hillside on Baraboo's north side with commanding views of the Baraboo bluffs to the south. Alf. T.'s purchase of land was the first time that one of the brothers had bought a piece of property individually in the city of Baraboo. All other purchases of land up to this point had been a joint effort and for the purpose of adding to the winter quarters.

A month after Alf. T.'s purchase, Al. Ringling joined suit and bought a lot close to downtown Baraboo at the southwest corner of Broadway and Fifth Streets on March 30,

1899.⁴ The location was a sentimental one for the eldest of the brothers. Just across the street to the north once stood the first home that his father had owned in Baraboo when the family moved to the city for the first time in 1855.⁵ Al. was only two-and-a-half years old at the time but would spend the next five years in the city. It was in this home that Al.'s brother Otto was born in 1858 and most likely George Ringling as well (the eighth Ringling brother who died in infancy in 1856). Al.'s purchase on the southwest corner included two small houses that had been built some time before 1885. According to Otto Ringling's obituary from 1911, at the time the circus started in 1884 the Ringling family lived in one of these houses.⁶ The family referenced was possibly Al. and his wife Lou since the Ringling parents had left Baraboo in November of 1883. If so, Al. had purchased a lot where he had lived as an adult and across from a lot where he had lived as a toddler.

Gus Ringling, while not one of the founding members of the Ringling Brothers circus in 1899, was a high ranking employee of his brothers and purchased property in Baraboo the day after his older brother Al.⁷ Gus chose the northeast corner of the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Birch Street. Much like Alf. T.'s purchase, the site was on a hillside which, for both brothers, would allow for views to the south but would also make construction and landscaping more challenging.

Charles Ringling was in reality the last of the brothers to officially purchase property even though *The Baraboo Republic* had reported on it five weeks before the sale. On April 7, 1899, just one week after Gus. made his purchase, Charles Ringling bought two lots from William and Anna Warren, not Carl Isenberg as the paper had reported.⁸ It is possible that Isenberg was somehow involved as a middle man and the reporter jumped the gun.

Once again, a corner lot was selected, this time at the northeast corner of the intersection of Eighth and Ash Streets. The site had only recently been rendered buildable when a portion of a small hill that sat largely to the north of the lot had been removed. The hill had been the site of a large stone house from the 1850s which had been moved to allow for the removal of the hill. The stone house rested on a new foundation to the east of and adjoining the lots that Charles Ringling purchased.

By early April of 1899 the flurry of buying was over just as the circus was about to pull out of Baraboo for the season. Four of the seven Ringling brothers had purchased properties on which to build permanent houses. All four brothers had chosen different building sites yet similari-

ties tied their choices together. All chose a corner lot, three of which would allow for a south facing house with Al's being the exception. The four were also the only brothers that were married at the time. Their timing was perhaps the biggest and yet most enigmatic similarity though. The fact that all four purchased property within a few weeks of each other shows some unified but as yet unknown commonality of thought.

Al's purchase price of \$1,850 was the highest but included two small houses. One of these would be removed to make way for the new house he would build. Charles Ringling paid the most for vacant land at \$1,800 which was perhaps the easiest to build on. The lot was flat like Al's but with no house to move out of the way. Gus. Ringling paid \$1,200 for his hillside lot and Alf. T. paid the least at \$1,100 for his sloping site. Gus. purchased the largest amount of land at .425 acres, just slightly larger than Alf. T's purchase and about twice the size of Charles' and Al's properties. Al., Alf. T., and Charles would eventually add to their lots by purchasing adjoining land but not until after their houses were built.

With each of their purchases the brothers had expressed a personal choice but yet had acted in unison, announcing to Baraboo that the Ringling brothers would call Baraboo home. While the selection of building sites gives a little insight into their personal preferences and egos, the houses that would be built by each brother would say far more.

Al. was the first to begin construction in the summer of 1899 when a contract was let to local builder Isenberg Brothers, consisting of George and Carl Isenberg, both German immigrants who were well-established contractors by this time. After removing one of the two small houses from the lot that Al. had purchased, the Isenbergs constructed a Queen Anne style residence in its place. The house was on the larger side for typical Baraboo homes up to that point with two parlors and maid's quarters and cost \$4,000.⁹ It would be the third most expensive home built in the city in 1899 out of nearly fifty new houses. The least expensive house built that

year cost a mere \$800 with the average home costing twice that much.

Al. may have succeeded in being the first of his brothers to begin construction, however his choice of design was something that he would begin to regret a few years later. The plan that he chose was actually a copy of another house just a few blocks away that had been constructed the year before for local businessman Herbert L. Halsted. The Halsted house was designed by local architect Reuben McFarland and had placed in a three way tie for the most expensive home built in the city in 1898.¹⁰ The house featured a wrap-around porch, clapboard and shingle siding and a variety of unique windows typical of the Queen Anne style with hints of the colonial revival style thrown in to keep things up-to-date. It is unknown if Al. and his wife Lou liked the house so much that they wanted to copy it or if they were looking to save money on design costs. With residential plan books well in hand by this time, the choice of a copycat house from a local architect must have been a calculated one. As the first new home that the couple had ever built and quite possibly the first new house that they had ever lived in, it was relatively large but not out of the ordinary. As the Ringlings' aspirations grew along with their fortunes, the house would soon come to be seen as far too small and ordinary.

While Al's house was the third most expensive in 1899, the most expensive that year would be that of Alf. T. Ringling who was the second brother to build. Alf. T's



The first home built by Al. Ringling in 1899 was a Queen Anne style house which was identical to another house built the year before.

Sauk County Historical Society

house would cost a whopping \$6,500, making it the most expensive house ever built in Baraboo up to that point and over fifty percent more costly than that of his oldest brother. Much of the reason for the higher cost was sheer size. The house was spacious, being about 40 by 65 feet in length and width and was designed on a grand scale by a well-known Minneapolis architect.

Alf. T.'s choice of architect was reported in the August 2, 1899 edition of *The Baraboo News* which reprinted an article from a Madison paper:

"While in Minneapolis with the Ringling brothers' circus, of which he is part owner, Alf. T. Ringling closed a deal with the leading architect of that city, Fred Kees, whereby the latter is to at once make plans for a palatial home Mr. Ringling is soon to erect in Baraboo, his home town. This residence will be one of the most luxurious in that little city of luxurious homes, and will be complete in every particular. In the early days of the Ringling brothers' career luxurious homes were unthought of, and it was a daily struggle for the necessary bread and butter. They were all strong, active young fellows, with a healthy ambition to get to the front, if it could be done honestly, and the circus which visited Minneapolis yesterday shows how successful they have been."

—*Madison Democrat*



The Halsted house in Baraboo was built in 1898 and provided inspiration for Al. Ringling's first home.

The Ringling circus had performed in Minneapolis on July 24 and it presumably was on this day that the showman met with the architect and commissioned him to draw up a house. It is possible that some contact had been made with the architect though before this date and the deal was formally "closed" when the circus came through the city. Whatever the case, in less than a month, plans were ready and construction began in Baraboo in late August of 1899. Isenberg Brothers were chosen as the contractors and were thus working on houses for both Al. Ringling and Alf. T. Ringling at the same time.

Why Alf. T. Ringling chose Fred Kees to design his house is a mystery. The architect had been in practice in Minneapolis for over twenty years and had designed many impressive buildings including the monstrous Minneapolis City Hall and Courthouse. It is not known if Alf. T. saw something he liked that was designed by the architect or whether he was referred to him by someone else. At any rate his choice was impressive and heralded his desire to start out with something grand. Kees designed a unique house for the Ringlings in the colonial revival style with a somewhat restrained exterior. The architect was faced with the challenge of a sloped site, but Kees used it to give the house a grand south facing entrance and a porte-cochère entrance to the west. The interiors were lavishly decorated with mahogany trim in many rooms, and bathrooms were outfitted with costly decorative tiles. The house also boasted all of the best technology of the time including gas and elec-

tric lights and a combined hot air and hot water heating system. For entertaining purposes the house even contained a pipe organ. When it was finished in early 1900, the house was the largest and costliest house built in Baraboo to date.

Unlike Al. and Alf. T., Charles and Gus. Ringling both waited until 1900 to start construction of their homes. In the case of the former the delay may have been related to the availability of the Isenberg Brothers who were busy building houses for Al. and Alf. T. but were worth waiting for as the Ringling brothers' preferred contractor. Gus could have built

Sauk County Historical Society



Alf. T. Ringling's home in Baraboo was designed by Minneapolis architect Fred Kees and was the costliest residence built in Baraboo in 1899.

Circus World

in 1899 but chose a different contractor and waited until March of 1900 before beginning work. Local contractor E. J. Campbell was selected to build a modest four square house with colonial revival details. The sloping site gave the house a grander effect than the house would have had otherwise on a flat lot. Even though Gus had purchased the largest site of the four brothers, the size and design of his house compared to those of his brothers reflected his status as an employee of the Ringling Brothers Circus and not an owner. The house cost \$3,000 when finished, less than half the cost of Alf. T.'s house and only a third of the cost of the

house that Charles Ringling was constructing at the same time.

Charles Ringling let the contract for the construction of his house to Isenberg Brothers in early April of 1900 just before the circus pulled out of town. The architect chosen was Alfred C. Clas of the Milwaukee firm of Ferry & Clas. The firm was well-known in Milwaukee as the designer of the Milwaukee Public Library and impressive residences such as the Captain Frederick Pabst Mansion. Clas also had a connection to the Baraboo area as a Sauk County native, having been born in Sauk City just a few

miles to the south. Local legend has it that Charles Ringling chose the architect due to his work on a nearby house which had been built in 1891. Clas designed a colonial revival style house for Charles and Edith Ringling and their two children. The house boasted a central hall with grand staircase lit by a stained-glass Palladian window flanked by two parlors on one side and a dining room and kitchen on the other. Upstairs the house featured five bedrooms and several bathrooms. The third floor had space to house a billiards table and maid's quarters. The exterior featured a full-width porch on the front of the house supported by



The home of Gus. Ringling was built in 1900 and reflected his status as an employee rather than an owner of the Ringling Brothers circus.

Sauk County Historical Society



Charles Ringling commissioned Alfred Clas of Milwaukee to design his home which was constructed in 1900 and cost \$9,000.

Sauk County Historical Society



The interior of the Charles Ringling home featured two spacious parlors and an eclectic mix of furniture.

Circus World

stately Ionic columns supporting a roof with wooden balustrades. The house was accepted by the Ringlings in December of 1900 and had cost \$9,000 to build, making it the costliest house in town and the new frontrunner amongst the Ringling brothers.

By the end of 1900 the initial round of construction was over. All four Ringling brothers who had purchased land in 1899 had built a house. The boys also constructed a house for their aging mother. Salome Ringling purchased a corner lot nearly equidistant from sons Al. and Charles in June of 1900. The money for the purchase price of \$1,150 undoubtedly came from her sons as did the \$3,000 that built a pleasant and roomy home for the matriarch and two of her adult children, Henry and Ida, who still resided with her. The house was large enough to allow mother Ringling to host her growing family for Christmas festivities until her death in 1907. The total for the first round of building was \$26,000 or the equivalent of 16 average sized homes.

For the next few years as the brothers settled into their new houses, most of them were inclined to add on and improve what they had initially built. Alf. T. added a sizable addition to his home in 1902 and improved his lot with massive



The Ringling brothers built a house for their mother in 1900 after their father had died two years earlier in a rented house.

Sauk County Historical Society

stone retaining walls the following year. Charles Ringling added a substantial wing to his residence which included a mahogany lined library and an additional bedroom. Additional land was also purchased and a carriage house with attached green house was also built along with a cottage for his mother-in-law and a small barn. Gus. Ringling added a small barn to his property but otherwise was content with what he had built. Both Al. and Charles also added to their holdings by purchasing additional adjoining lots.

After several years, Al. Ringling was unsatisfied with the size and finish of his original house and tried to find an-



The Charles Ringling house was expanded with a two-story addition in the back which added a library and an additional bedroom.

Circus World



Charles Ringling added a two-story carriage house with attached green house, directly behind residence.

Sauk County Historical Society

other lot on which to build something larger. Nothing seemed to suit him however and his attachment to the corner which he had purchased in 1899 induced him to take steps to start over, only this time on a much grander scale. *The Baraboo Republic* of March 30, 1904 reported that Ringling had purchased land near his house for the purpose of moving his current house off of its lot in order to make way for a "palatial residence." The newspaper article concluded by stating, "It is safe to say that when Mr. Ringling builds it will be the equal, if not finer,



Isenberg Brothers were the general contractors for Al. Ringling's mansion which took over a year to construct.

Sauk County Historical Society



The interior of the Al. Ringling mansion, shown here after being turned into an Elks clubhouse in the 1930s, featured a grand central hall and staircase.

Below, the exterior of the Al. Ringling mansion was covered in brownstone from the Lake Superior region.

both photos from the
Sauk County Historical Society

than anything in the city. The Ringling homes in Baraboo are the pride of every one and all will be pleased if the 'last shall be best.'"

The newspaper reporter's last statement would prove to be prophetic when Al. Ringling started building the following year. After his 1899 house was moved to a nearby lot in early 1905, workmen began tearing down the remaining small home and outbuilding that came with Ringling's original purchase in order to clear the site.

This time Al. Ringling chose a recognized architect to design his palatial new residence. Whether out of respect or one-ups-man-ship, Ringling chose none other than Fred Kees of Minneapolis to design the largest house ever built in the county. Kees delivered a design which was far different from the one he had executed for Alf. T. Ringling six years earlier. Al. Ringling's house would be built of brick, concrete and steel and faced with brown stone from the Lake Superior area. The design was Richardsonian Romanesque in style with rusticated stone work but without the use of semi-circular arches. Segmental arches sitting on polished granite columns were used to support a wrap-around verandah on the front of the residence and the porte-cochère on the side. A massive three and a half story tower anchored the corner of the building and the main roof was covered with green terra cotta tiles.





His and hers master bathrooms in the Al. Ringling mansion were the height of luxury considering that only about 10% of homes had indoor plumbing in 1906.

Sauk County Historical Society

Inside, the new mansion would boast a grand central hall with fluted Ionic pilasters done in oak. Off of the central hall would open the principal rooms including a ladies' parlor done in the Louis XIV style, a men's parlor paneled in mahogany, a dining room with Germanic overtones and a billiards room with a hand painted wall mural. All of the rooms were enhanced with some sort of decorative paint effect including murals, elaborate stencils and metallic leaf. The house would boast over sixty-five stained glass pieces in the windows and built-in bookcases, each corresponding to the style of the particular room they were in. A stained glass conservatory was also built off of the landing of the grand staircase over the porte-cochère. The second floor would contain four family bedrooms including his and hers master bedrooms, each with private attached bathrooms. Servants' quarters and support space would make up the rest of the house along with a ballroom in the basement. The contractor of course would be Isenberg Brothers.

Construction of the massive home was stalled due to the lack of materials in the summer of 1905, and masons did not commence laying stone until early August. Undoubtedly this set the project back. During the winter of 1905-06 the unfinished building sat idle until spring broke and the masons could begin again. The balance of the year was spent finishing the residence and by mid-December

construction on the project was finished. A massive two-story stone carriage house was also constructed on the back of the property costing \$8,000. The total for the residence itself was \$35,000 making it far and away the most expensive dwelling in the county. With its completion Al. Ringling had secured his place among his brothers and the public. No other Ringling houses were built in Baraboo after this. For now, Al. Ringling was the owner of the most impressive home in the family.

All in all, from 1899 to 1906 the Ringling brothers spent over \$92,000 on residences and out buildings in Baraboo – the cost equivalent of over 57 average homes. The cost of Al. Ringling's mansion and carriage house alone would have built more than twenty-five homes. This was all on top

of the money they had spent constructing buildings at their winter quarters, buying other smaller circuses, purchasing animals – one giraffe could cost as much as \$17,000 – and expanding their operations.

The building campaign came to an end in 1907 when circumstances once again added up to compel restraint. The financial panic of 1907 was one of the biggest factors. The economic slowdown which ensued affected the entire nation but also brought about the opportunity for the Ringlings to purchase their rival, the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which had been struggling since James Bailey's death in 1906. The opportunity was one the brothers ultimately could not pass up but also could not pursue without a loan. After borrowing \$360,000 for the purchase, the Ringlings were consumed with managing the two largest circus operations in the world along with all of their holdings. Personal spending slowed down, at least for a while.

Several of the Ringling brothers would eventually build much larger houses in other cities and states. Alf. T., Charles, and John Ringling all built lavish mansions that dwarfed anything built in Baraboo. But it was in Baraboo first, that the Ringling brothers expressed their personalities and aspirations through the homes that they built. While each endeavor was unique, they also collectively proclaimed that the circus nomads had become circus kings. **BW**



The Al. Ringling mansion was the largest house ever built in Baraboo and cost the equivalent of over twenty average homes of its day.

Sauk County Historical Society

Endnotes

1. The married life of Al. and Lou Ringling is full of mystery. While allegedly married in 1883 no official civil or religious records have ever been found to support this. The couple was officially married in Hoboken, New Jersey in November of 1890. Lou Ringling had been previously married and how this marriage ended is unknown.
2. *The Baraboo Republic*, March 1, 1899.
3. Deed of Sale from Carl and Ida Isenberg to Alfred. T. Ringling, February 28, 1899 (recorded March 24, 1899), Sauk County, Wisconsin, Deed Volume 75, page 415, Register of Deed's Office, Baraboo, Wisconsin
4. Deed of Sale from Julia W. Crouch and Minnie Belle Knappe, (formerly Benedict) to Albert. C. Ringling, March 30, 1899 (recorded April 5, 1899), Sauk County, Wisconsin, Deed Volume 75, page 444, Register of Deed's Office, Baraboo, Wisconsin
5. Deed of Sale from Leroy D. and Lucy A. Gage to A. Ringling, May 21, 1855 (recorded October 2, 1855), Sauk County, Wisconsin, Deed Volume N, page 160, Register of Deed's Office, Baraboo, Wisconsin
6. *The Baraboo News*, April 13, 1911.
7. Deed of Sale from W. D. and Flora Stanley to August T. Ringling, March 31, 1899 (recorded March 31, 1899), Sauk County, Wisconsin, Deed Volume 75, page 434, Register of Deed's Office, Baraboo, Wisconsin
8. Deed of Sale from William A. and Annie H. Warren to Chas. R. Ringling, April 7, 1899 (recorded April 24, 1899), Sauk County, Wisconsin, Deed Volume 75, page 502, Register of Deed's Office, Baraboo, Wisconsin
9. *Sauk County Democrat*, December 14, 1899.
10. *Sauk County Democrat*, November 24, 1898.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL

Do you love circus music?

You don't need to play an instrument!

Windjammers membership is open to ALL interested in the heritage, preservation and performance of the traditional circus music. At each meeting, recordings are made to preserve this heritage of circus music. Membership includes the Circus Fanfare magazine and opportunities to attend the annual convention in the Sarasota, FL area each January and the summer meet at various locations across the U.S. and Canada. Our Annual Convention will be January 12-17, 2016, and our Summer Meet will be July 26-31, 2016 in Baraboo, WI.

Climb on the bandwagon and join
WINDJAMMERS!



CIRCUS MODEL BUILDERS



HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND A BRIGHT NEW YEAR

Not a member of CMB? See what you're missing with a **free issue** of *Little Circus Wagon*, our official magazine. Just send an email to <LCWeditors@midohio.twcbc.com> or call 614-261-0454. **To join CMB**, just use the application form on the wrapper of your free magazine or go to our website <www.circusmodelbuilders.com> and follow the instructions. Hope to see you soon!

**Peace To
All Who Love
THE CIRCUS**

**Douglas D. Cole, CHS #2640
Simsbury CT**



CALL! 📞 🕒 📞 CALL!

The second 2016 issue of *Bandwagon* will focus on African Americans and the American circus. An unpublished side show musician's diary and a superb side show personality biography are already committed to the pages. The editors desire submittals about black ring performers, groups of African-American employees and specific associated topics that will enlighten and educate.

If you have an article or proposal, please submit it ASAP, providing the topic/focus, estimated length (word count), and availability of images.

Deadline: All finished papers must be submitted as standard WORD (.doc or .docx) files, without formatting, by March 1, 2016.

Transmit your proposals or papers
for consideration to

Fred Dahlinger, Jr., Associate Editor at
CHSBandwagon@gmail.com



**You send the stories to Jennifer.
We put them in *Bandwagon*.
Christmas all year long!**



Circus World Museum Kelley's Vision Brought to Life

by Greg Parkinson

Heralded with a festive parade and ribbon cutting, on July 1, 1959 Circus World Museum opened on the grounds of the original Ringling winter quarters in Baraboo. This momentous occasion resulted from the efforts of a handful of individuals. Chief among that dedicated group was John M. Kelley who dreamed of creating a circus museum in the Wisconsin town where the Ringling brothers had based their operations for three and a half decades. It took nearly 15 years for Kelley to achieve his goal. Circus World Museum's opening in 1959 was due in large measure to Kelley's absolute determination and his solid partnership with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.¹ Kelley also benefited greatly from the help of a small group of dedicated individuals from Baraboo and beyond. Collections housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society, provide a window on the

collaboration and process that established this unique historical treasure.

The would-be founder of Circus World Museum, John Kelley, graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1903. He moved to the Ringlings' home town that same year and served as the city attorney. Two years later Charles Ringling asked John M. Kelley (1873-1963) to represent the circus in a lawsuit involving a blowdown of the performance tent in Missouri. This marked the beginning of Kelley's long association with the Ringlings as their private attorney. Among the highlights of his legal career was his role providing counsel when the Ringling brothers acquired Barnum & Bailey in 1907. Kelley also was present when John Ringling consummated the purchase of the American Circus Corporation in 1929 just before the Stock

To the left is John M. Kelley, founder of Circus World Museum, 1961.

Circus World

Market crash at the end of October. In July 1932 when John Ringling was "forced out" and lost control of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, it was Kelley who advised the opposition – Sam Gumpertz representing the circus creditors, Edith Ringling (Charles's widow), and Aubrey Ringling (Alf. T.'s daughter-in-law).² Kelley retired from practicing law in 1937.

Toward the end of World War II, Kelley began to contemplate a tribute to the Ringlings that would be housed in some of the old winter quarters buildings on Water Street in Baraboo. Charles Philip "Chappie" Fox recalled talking to Kelley about a circus museum in 1945.³ The earliest letters from Kelley to State Historical Society of Wisconsin officials that are retained in its archives are two to Wilbur H. Glover in 1949.⁴ In the first of these, Kelley mentioned the possibility of his circus collection being sent to the State Historical Society's Library. Neither letter referenced the idea of a circus museum.

The first reference found in the Historical Society's holdings to "a permanent museum home" is contained in a 1951 letter from Kelley to J. B. Palmer of Sarasota suggesting that Palmer donate the Two Hemispheres Band Wagon to the proposed museum.⁵ In this letter, Kelley stated that "Baraboo stands alone...It is the only spot on earth where all of them [the Ringling brothers] together lived and labored in the building and maturity of the circus..." In this letter Kelley also noted previous discussions he had with the Historical Society's Director, Clifford L. Lord, about a circus museum.

It is not known when Kelley first advanced his museum idea to Dr. Lord and the Historical Society. However, by February 1951 the two men were exchanging letters. In November 1951 Lord wrote to Kelley and told him he had met with the Executive Committee of the Historical Society's Board of Curators and discussed with them the possibility of raising funds for a new circus museum.⁶ Extensive correspondence and meetings between Kelley and Lord continued thereafter until Lord's resignation in 1958.

Clifford Lord was hired by the State Historical Society in 1946. He is credited as having been "...instrumental in reviving the Society after the strains of two world wars and the Great Depression."⁷ More specifically, Lord helped the Historical Society to "evolve from a scholarly research institution into" an organization that placed public service at the forefront.⁸ Under Lord the Historical Society empha-

sized local history, and it acquired and began operation of its first historic sites. Villa Louis, a Victorian era estate, opened in Prairie du Chien in April 1952. Wade House in Greenbush, a historic stagecoach inn, opened June 6, 1953 with Carl Sandberg present for the ceremonies. The opening of Stonefield Village, a recreated rural village at the site of the summer retreat of Wisconsin's first Governor, outside of Cassville followed in July 1953. Circus World Museum would be the Historical Society's fourth historic site.

Kelley's project gained some momentum in early 1952. At Lord's invitation, Kelley spoke to the Society's Board of Curators about the project on Saturday, January 26. The President of the Board of Curators appointed a Circus Museum Committee on March 1 to explore the possibility of establishing a circus museum in Wisconsin.⁹ A meeting with local community leaders was held in Baraboo during the evening of March 6. This was the occasion when Kelley announced that "under certain conditions the Society would help establish a museum in this city."¹⁰ He said that the main condition was that the museum would be part of



During his tenure as Director of the State Historical Society, Clifford L. Lord joined John M. Kelley in an aggressive pursuit of a circus museum in Baraboo. Dr. Lord was 40 years old when this photo was taken in 1953.

Wisconsin Historical Society ID 98886

the "state society." Kelley also reported that the Historical Society would help, not only in the fund-raising activity, but also in collection acquisition. A local committee was formed to support and promote the project. Kelley was elected chair of the committee, and a resolution was passed in support of the proposal that the museum be a part of the State Historical Society.

Efforts to acquire materials for the new circus museum shifted into high gear in the spring of 1952. Kelley and Lord worked together to track down the Columbia Bandwagon, the American Steam Calliope, and the Gollmar Bros. Mirror Bandwagon.¹¹ Lord wrote to Kelley in May and told him that he had received a call from Fred W. Hainer who stated that boiler system manufacturer Cleaver-Brooks or the Wisconsin Power and Light Company would present the calliope wagon to the Historical Society in the very near future.¹²

At the urging of Kelley, Clifford Lord traveled to Darlington to meet with Arthur Parson, to Watertown to meet with Edward Parson, and to Milwaukee to see Frances Parson – all in the hope of obtaining the Parson collection that included the Telegraph Wagon that the Parson family had used when they were concessionaires on the Ringling Bros. Circus during its early wagon show seasons. Edward Parson responded on behalf of his father, Arthur, and the rest of the family, promising a loan of the collection if the museum was built.¹³

The Historical Society took steps in September to strengthen its ad hoc Circus Museum Committee. The Board of Curators President, D. C. Everest, invited certain prominent Wisconsin individuals to serve. Among them was Henry E. Ringling of Baraboo who accepted the invitation without delay.¹⁴ Henry was the son of Henry G. Ringling, one of the seven famous brothers.

Kelley wrote Lord and stated that he was not making any progress in obtaining winter quarters property and that he did not want to expend further effort on the endeavor unless the Ring Barn and Camel House properties appealed to the Historical Society.¹⁵ He invited Lord to tour the winter quarters site on Thursday, September 17.

Previously, Kelley had gone through a period of favoring the construction of a new museum building near the intersection of Broadway and Water Street. In this same letter to Lord, Kelley also noted that he had given Chappie Fox "the green light on getting the old Columbia band wagon" and that Chappie had secured an option on the wagon for \$350.

Kelley must have been delighted with the concept and news that Lord related to him in late October.

"My thought would be that you should incorporate as soon as possible as the Circus Museum Incorporated, or some such title...filling out a statement of purpose sufficiently broad to encompass all possible activities of the corporation, and get them back to me in time for the next meeting of the Executive Committee...I think there is no question ...that the Executive Committee will approve affiliation with the Society and that we should soon be in shape to move ahead."¹⁶

Earl Chapin May, the author of *The Circus from Rome to Ringling*, committed his collection to the Historical Society toward the end of 1952. The Don Howland circus collection was also acquired by the society with the understand-



The Parson Telegraph Wagon hauled concessions equipment and supplies during the early wagon show seasons of the Ringling Bros. Circus. Parson family members referred to the wagon as the Telegraph Wagon because they had also used it for a secondary purpose. It served to route the show's caravan of wagons from one town to another by "railing" crossroads to indicate to following horse-drawn wagons which way to proceed.

Circus World



ing that it was to stay in Madison until suitable housing was available in Baraboo. Over the next three years, Lord used the news of these acquisitions in an attempt to persuade others to gift their collections to the society. He gained support from the likes of Ringling relatives Henry Moeller and Robert H. Gollmar, but was eventually unsuccessful in obtaining materials from Bert Wilson, Walter C. Scholl, Karl Knecht, and Joe W. Taggart who wanted cash for his fine miniature circus. Walter Scholl was willing to sell his collection for \$15,000. Lord obtained an option from Scholl, but was not able to secure the funding before his departure from the Society in 1958.

Not everyone agreed that Baraboo was the best location for the museum that would commemorate Wisconsin's rich circus heritage. Delevan had been advanced as a possibility, but was ruled out by Kelley and the Circus Museum Committee that Lord had established.¹⁷ Circus fan and photographer Sverre Braathen wrote Lord in 1954 and stated his belief that Madison was "the ideal site."¹⁸ Braathen noted that Madison was located about equidistant between Wisconsin's two most important circus towns, Baraboo and Delevan. Just a month earlier the Historical Society had

Joel Salter's 1959 painting entitled "Mud Show" depicted the overland transport of the Ringling Bros. Circus in its wagon show era.

Circus World

embarked on a two-year remodeling of its Headquarters facility that had first opened in 1900. Construction of new gallery spaces on the first floor and basement level would nearly double the building's exhibit area when completed.¹⁹ Braathen proposed that a Circus Hall of Fame occupy some of the exhibit areas. In fact, Sverre Braathen had been advancing his Madison circus exhibit idea to Dr. Lord since 1947.²⁰ He reasoned that the larger population of Madison and proximity to the State Capitol would serve well in terms of attracting visitation. Lord, however, agreed with Kelley that Baraboo was the appropriate site due to the Ringling's great rags-to-riches story and the existence of much of the old winter quarters facility. He diplomatically rejected Braathen's proposal.

The Columbia Bandwagon was the first historic vehicle to arrive in Baraboo for the new museum. The date was April 9, 1954.²¹ Kelley had purchased the storied parade treasure, paying for it "out of his own pocket." Arrange-

ments were made with the Effinger Brewery to store Columbia in the basement of the company's bottling facility on Lynn Street²² until such time as properties on Water Street were acquired for Circus World Museum. Two additional historic parade wagons were donated to the Historical Society in 1954, although the lack of space to store large artifacts led to a delay in transporting them to Baraboo. The Mother Goose Pony Float was donated by Chappie Fox, and The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe Pony Float was gifted by Roland K. Wilde.

Things really started to fall in line during the summer of 1954. On June 24 the Board of Curators of the State Historical Society approved the Articles of Incorporation for an intermediate corporation named Circus World Museum, Inc.²³ With this approval, Kelley, Robert H. Gollmar, and Fred C. Gollmar signed the Articles of Incorporation. The purpose of the corporation as set forth in Article 3 was "To establish the Museum of the American Circus and to develop it to the point where the State Historical Society of Wisconsin will be willing and able to take it over and

operate it..."²⁴ Article 11 further stated "...this corporation shall at all times be an affiliate of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and shall operate under the general supervision of said State Historical Society..."

Also on June 24, the City Council of Baraboo voted to purchase the Ring Barn property for the new museum. The city authorized \$10,000 for the acquisition. Kelley now had the Historical Society's full commitment, several circus parade wagons, a new corporation, and the assurance of receiving one of the Ringling winter quarters buildings.

Following these big developments, Kelley arranged for a showing of Paramount's 1952 Best Picture of the Year, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, at the Al Ringling Theater on Saturday and Sunday, July 3 and 4. The net proceeds were used to support the circus museum project. The Board of Curators and members of the Circus Museum Committee were invited as special guests.²⁵

In the fall of 1954, Kelley and Lord discussed graphics that might be used on a new letterhead and for promotional purposes.²⁶ One of the items on hand was a small lithograph that was printed in the mid-1840s. Its central engraved image depicted Richard Sands riding Roman style astride four charging horses. Chappie Fox suggested that this artwork crown the new letterhead for the local support group that had recently been incorporated. After 1959 the artwork was adopted for use on the museum's actual letterhead. The "Richard Sands letterhead" would be used by Circus World Museum for more than 40 years.

In May of 1955 Clifford Lord and Henry Ringling exchanged letters. Lord explained to Mr. Ringling of the need for additional property and also for "a fireproof library building."²⁷ Ringling responded by suggesting that old brick Elephant Barn could be available for the latter purpose. He further stated that his mother might be willing to provide the funding to acquire and remodel the Elephant Barn.²⁸ He concluded by explaining to Lord that he was involved in his own reelection campaign as the Wisconsin representative to the Republican National Committee and that he would not be able to "get involved" with the Elephant Barn discussions until after the end of the state GOP convention in late June. Thereafter, Henry's health deteriorated. He died at the age of 49 in early December. The idea for a fireproof library would not be fulfilled until 1969.

Collection activity intensified in 1956. Jake Posey – the legendary Barnum & Bailey 40 horse hitch driver – offered "to contribute anything of interest..."²⁹ Lord sent several letters to former circus band director Karl L. King. The Barnum & Bailey Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe



Lithograph depicting various equestrian performances of Richard Sands, c. 1844.

Circus World



Harry Atwell photographed the American circus scene for 43 years. In 1956, the Milwaukee Journal purchased Atwell's collection of some 5,000 negatives and subsequently donated the collection to the State Historical Society.

Circus World

Float was received and moved into the Ring Barn where Ernie Zimmerly began repairs on the wagon's historic carvings. Retired circus owner, George W. Christy, confirmed his willingness to donate the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Tableau Cage that was wasting away in his quarters in South Houston, Texas.³⁰

Another important acquisition during this period was the massive collection of photographs and negatives created by freelance professional photographer Harry Atwell.

Among other assignments during his illustrious career, Atwell had been a personal photographer for former President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904. Alf T. Ringling offered Atwell a job making and selling souvenir postcards during the 1910 tour. That season on the road with Ringling Bros. Circus marked the beginning of a remarkable 43 year span during which Atwell focused his camera lens on the American circus scene. Throughout most of his career, Atwell lived and worked in Chicago. Tom Parkinson, Circus Editor of *Billboard* magazine, also based in Chicago, and Chappie Fox, knew of Atwell's legendary circus images and they befriended him in the early 1950s. According to Fox, they had lunch with Atwell many times at the Sherman Hotel in downtown Chicago.³¹

In the summer of 1956, Atwell called Fox and offered to sell his negative collection for \$1,500. Fox met with Wallace Lamoe, the editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, in pursuit of the needed funding. When shown a selection of Atwell's photos, Lamoe immediately became enthused. He convinced the Publisher, Irwin Maier, to buy the negatives. Fox flew to Atwell's retirement home in Sarasota and final-

Featured equestrienne, Dorothy Herbert, photographed by Harry Atwell in the John Robinson Circus backyard, 1929.

Circus World





Left, legendary aerialist Lillian Leitzel posed for Harry Atwell next to a mother and baby zebra in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey menagerie, 1928.

Circus World

Below, Henry Ringling North declined an appeal by United States Senator Alexander Wiley and the State Historical Society to donate eight parade wagons owned by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey to the new museum in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives

ized the purchase. Five months later, the Journal Company donated the Atwell collection of 5,000 circus negatives to the State Historical Society. Maier's interest in the proposed circus museum skyrocketed, and the Journal Company would later help plan a fund-raising campaign to benefit the museum.

In February 1957, John Kelley and Chappie Fox disputed one aspect concerning the future of Circus World Museum. Fox believed that the physical plant should be limited to the winter quarters buildings³² and that the atmosphere of Water Street needed to be preserved. Kelley profusely disagreed. He proclaimed that the aging Ringling buildings did not have any atmosphere. They only had "sentiment." Kelley wrote, "A museum to flourish must have life."³³ He asserted that a new museum building in which to house and exhibit circusiana should be built adjacent to the historic properties. "In the absence of a circusy, showy main museum building we have nothing to feature. It would be a miserable picture...If the circus was anything, it way [sic] showy, colorful, boisterous, bombastic and fantastic." Their differences on this subject did not prevent Kelley and Fox from continuing to work together as good and supportive friends.

Clifford Lord often sought the advice of Chappie Fox or Tom Parkinson concerning the importance of a particular collection or artifact. Such was the case when the Gollmar Bros. Mirror Bandwagon seemed to be within reach. Parkinson stressed the unique history of the wagon noting that the Gollmar Bros. Circus was a Baraboo show, the brothers were cousins of the Ringlings, and Gollmar was a significant part of the Wisconsin circus story. The bandwagon was in the possession of the Park Board in Peoria, Illinois.



New York, New York
April 23, 1958

Senator Alexander Wiley
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Wiley:

Your letter of 19th April addressed to my brother, John, has come to my attention as he is presently on the West Coast.

I certainly appreciate your interest in our few remaining historically important parade wagons. However, at this time we have no intention of disposing of them.

You may be sure that I will be very happy to keep you and the Wisconsin Historical Society in mind in the event that we might wish to dispose of the wagons at some future date.

Kind personal regards.

Sincerely,

Henry Ringling North
Henry Ringling North

HRN/jh

The Pabst Brewing Co. of Milwaukee helped to acquire the wagon and to transfer its ownership to the State Historical Society. However, Pabst demanded that there be no publicity about the role the company played.³⁴ The historic wagon arrived in Baraboo before the end of July 1957.

Clifford Lord reached high in his effort to secure funding and collections. He wrote to the head of the Ford Foundation in New York soliciting financial support.³⁵ He convinced United States Senator Alexander Wiley to contact John Ringling North to see if North would donate the Five Graces Bandwagon, the Ringling Bros. Bell Wagon and six other historic wagons still owned by the circus.³⁶ Henry Ringling North responded on behalf of his brother John, politely declining while pledging to keep the Wisconsin Historical Society in mind.³⁷

George L. Chindahl's papers and collection were received by the Historical Society on July 18, 1958 – 24 boxes

in the first shipment. The Chindahl collection included route books, posters, heralds, lengthy runs of *The New York Clipper* and *Billboard*, and much more. Tom Parkinson and Chappie Fox appraised the collection for the Society and valued it at \$19,675.

Clifford Lord resigned as Director of the State Historical Society in September 1958 to become the Dean of the School of General Studies at Columbia University. Lord had written hundreds of letters and met personally with hundreds of people championing Kelley's vision. However, the baton was now handed off to Donald R. McNeil who became Acting Director of the Historical Society upon

State Historical Society Exhibit Curator Joel Salter with his Richard Sands painting that for many years to follow was affixed to the exterior of the Ring Barn to greet Circus World Museum visitors.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives



Lord's departure.

Cleaver-Brooks donated the America Steam Calliope to the Historical Society, and it was hauled to Baraboo on December 2, 1958. The Milwaukee based company had renovated America's boiler and calliope apparatus to safe working condition. Zimmerly, Leonard Perkins, and others went to work on the wagon's structure, carvings, and multi-colored decorative paint scheme.

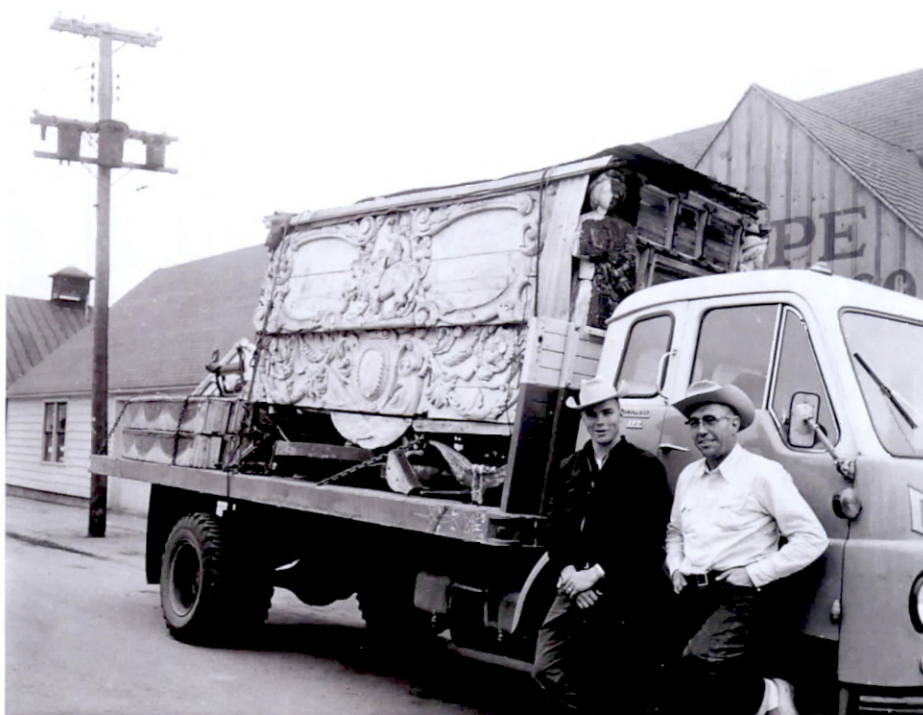
Work progressed toward a 1959 opening of the new Circus World Museum. The Historical Society contracted with Creative Outdoor Advertising for nine billboards in the Baraboo/Devils Lake, Wisconsin Dells, Portage, and Lake Geneva areas. The price was \$7.50 each per month for 36 months. In March 1959 the City of Baraboo transferred the Ring Barn property to Circus World Museum, Inc. The Historical Society ordered 30,000 adult and 10,000 child tickets from the Arcus Ticket Company, priced at 60 cents and 15 cents, respectively. Ida Ringling – the 88 year old sister of the famous brothers and mother of John and Henry Ringling North – donated \$1,500 for an entrance bannerline to span between the Ring Barn and Camel House. The center panel of the bannerline was designed and worded by Tom Parkinson. It was painted in Chicago under Parkinson's direction. Historical Society curator, Joel Salter, painted Mud Show depicting the early morning transport of the Ringling wagon show. This was installed among the exhibits in the Ring Barn. Salter also painted a large version of the Richard Sands logo for placement on the exterior of

the Ring Barn.

Chappie Fox made arrangements with his friend, Wilbur Deppe, to journey to the old Christy Bros. winter quarters in South Houston to pick up the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Tableau Cage. In April, Deppe's son, David, made the trip with Deppe shop foreman, Ray Broihahn. Upon seeing the wagon in Texas, Deppe immediately recognized that it was in deplorable condition. He placed a call to Fox that was soon returned. Dave Deppe told Fox that the wagon was missing carvings and had deteriorated to the point that it was "nothing but a pile of junk." Fox exclaimed over the phone, "That's historic junk!"³⁸ The wagon was trucked back to Baraboo, arriving on April 8, 1959. A complete restoration of the wagon was completed in less than three months.

Questions arose concerning which entity actually owned some of the wagons and other circus artifacts that had been acquired for the museum. State Historical Society curator, John W. Winn, had been assigned to be the director of Circus World Museum. He convened a meeting that took place during the evening of April 29. In attendance were John Kelley, Clark Wilkinson, Chappie Fox, Donald McNeil, Walter Dunn, and Winn. The determinations regarding ownership were recorded by Winn.³⁹ The Historical Society owned the Gollmar Bros. Mirror Bandwagon; Mother Goose; The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe; the America Steam Calliope; and the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Cage Tableau. John M. Kelley owned the Columbia Bandwagon and the Ringling Bros. Spectacle Cannon that had been abandoned at the winter quarters. And Circus World Museum, Inc. owned the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Stake and Chain Wagon, two Sells Bros. Cage side panels, and the Parson Collection that included the Telegraph Wagon. Winn also noted that he and Kelley had agreed that at a later date they would resolve whether the Historical Society or Kelley owned certain small artifacts then located in the Ring Barn.

On May 26, 1959, the State Histori-



David Deppe and Ray Broinhahn relaxed for this photo having just returned from South Houston, Texas with the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Tableau Cage, April 8, 1959. Circus World



Ernie Zimmerly is seen on a ladder in the south end of the Ring Barn in April 1959 preparing the Columbia Bandwagon for the inaugural opening of Circus World Museum. The new concrete floor covered the dirt ring area where riders and liberty horses had trained from 1897 to 1918.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives



cal Society and Circus World Museum, Inc. (CWM Inc.) finalized a memorandum of agreement that covered key elements of the new museum's ownership and operation.⁴⁰ The two entities agreed that all of CWM Inc.'s property would be transferred to the Historical Society on July 1, 1959 – the day the museum was to open. This included the Ring Barn property that had been transferred to CWM Inc. two months before, the Parson Collection, the Sells Bros. Cage side panels, and the Forepaugh-Sells Stake and Chain

John M. Kelley inspects wagon restoration work in the Ring Barn, April 1959.

Circus World

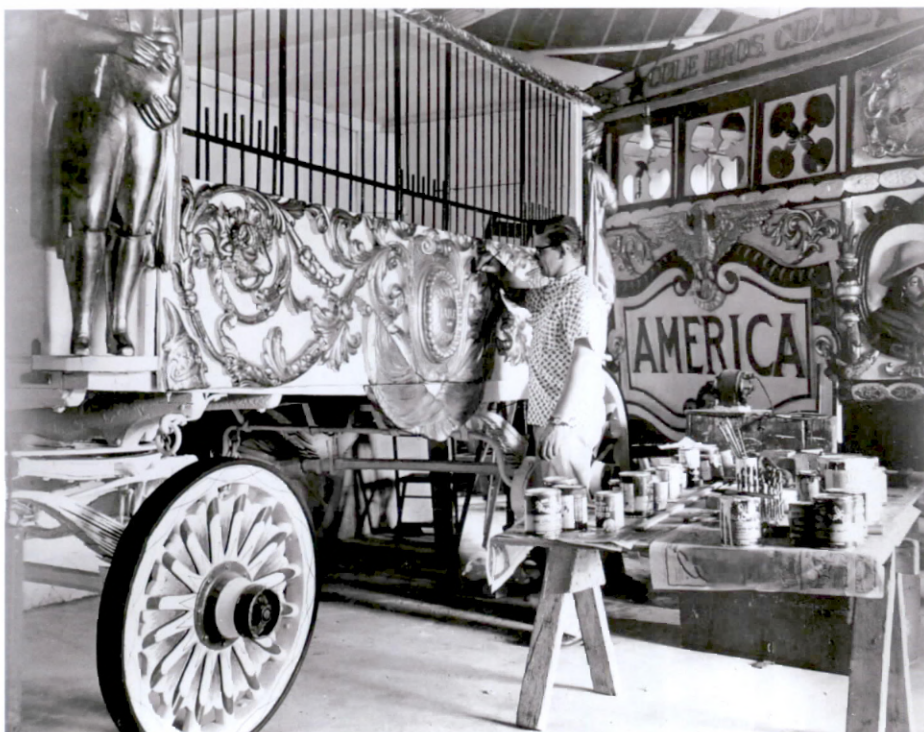
Wagon. CWM Inc. also agreed to lease the Ringling Bros. Camel House property to the Historical Society on July 1 or if acquired by that date to deed it to the Society along with the Ring Barn. There was further agreement that all properties acquired by CWM Inc. after July 1, 1959 "...will be considered the property of the Society..."

At the proverbial eleventh hour, it was decided that a bridge was needed to allow visitors access to the vacant property on the south side of the Baraboo River where a small menagerie and an outdoor performance venue would be set up. There were only nine days to go before the opening of Circus World Museum. Wilbur Deppe was up to the task and came to the rescue. Pledging to complete the bridge and have it ready for use by July 1, Deppe wrote to Circus World Museum. The first paragraph of his letter read, "As per our conversation

we will construct a five-foot pedestrian bridge across the Baraboo River directly behind the Circus World Museum site, complete in place for a price not to exceed \$4,500.00."⁴¹ The Historical Society agreed to pay for the bridge. Two piers were placed in the riverbed, and the footbridge was assembled on schedule as promised.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin prepared and sent out a press release heralding the big day in Baraboo. The official opening of Circus World Museum would be preceded by a circus parade in the morning. Immediately following the parade, the opening ceremonies would begin. The day would be topped off with "the world premiere of the Hollywood movie, *The Big Circus* that night."⁴²

Wednesday, July 1, 1959 arrived. The parade began at 9:00 A.M. Bill Morris's elephant led the parade. Miss Rhonda Fleming, one of the stars of *The Big Circus*, declined the invitation to ride the lead elephant. Instead she rode on a float with the Sauk County Circus Band. Among the parade's 72 units, there were two horse-drawn wagons from Circus World Museum – Mother Goose and The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe.⁴³ Kelly, Fox, and Tom Parkinson rode in open convertible automobiles. They were followed by Historical Society officials and Clifford Lord in another convertible. Hamm's, Miller High Life, and the local Effinger Beer all provided parade entries. The Water-



The finishing touches were applied to the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Tableau Cage in June 1959.

Circus World

town Twirlettes, Madison roller skaters, and yodelers from New Glarus gave the parade an unusual, although festive, flavor. Crowd estimates provided by newspaper accounts varied – 15,000, 35,000, and 40,000.

As reported by Fred D. Pfening, Jr. in the July-August 1959 issue of *Bandwagon*, the opening day parade ended in front of the museum on Water Street. Chappie Fox served as the master of ceremonies on a stage that had been erected in front of the Ring Barn. He introduced, John M. Kelley, actress Rhonda Fleming, and Historical Society officials. The deed to the Ring Barn was presented to the State Historical Society as part of the ceremony.⁴⁴ Kelly cut the ribbon and Circus World Museum's first visitors crowded through the opening in the bannerline.

In addition to the collection of old circus wagons, visitors saw Silver King's box stall in the Ring Barn, the John and Jan Zweifel miniature circus, framed circus posters, the Ringling Spec Cannon, Joel Salter's Mud Show painting, an assortment of Atwell photographs, and much more. The America Steam Calliope blasted away near the banks of the Baraboo River. Across the river nine small cage wagons of animals were featured in a 60 by 90 foot menagerie tent, and elephant rides were offered.

The Milwaukee Journal reported that 10,872 visitors attended Circus World Museum on its first day.⁴⁵ However,



Chappie Fox introduced the speakers during the Circus World Museum grand opening ceremonies. Rhonda Fleming and John M. Kelley are seated at Chappie's left.

Circus World

that figure counted several thousand passes that had been distributed to school children and others. The accurate visitation is unknown.

The State Historical Society operated its fourth historic site for the duration of 1959. John Winn continued to serve as Circus World Museum Director. Historical Society Director, Donald McNeil, resigned in July after secretly marrying the Society's Public Relations Chief, Patricia McGinnis. Leslie H. Fishel, Jr. was quickly recruited, and he took over on August 1, 1959.

On August 28, the Board of Curators Executive Committee met in Madison. Chappie Fox was in attendance. He expressed his desire to become an employee of the State Historical Society and to manage Circus World Museum.⁴⁶ He requested a \$10,000 salary. One of the Curators, Frederic Sammond of Milwaukee, stated his belief that the position Mr. Fox sought did not fit the State's civil service system.

One month later, the Historical Society's Sites Management Committee met in Sammond's law office in Mil-

waukee. At this meeting, Sammond suggested that a foundation be created to operate the Historical Society's four historic sites including Circus World Museum. A motion was approved to recommend to the Board of Curators "That a new corporation, tentatively entitled Historic Sites Foundation be established" to operate Circus World Museum on a trial basis.⁴⁷ The motion further proposed that a lease and management agreement be written and executed to provide Historic Sites Foundation the authority to operate Circus World Museum. The motion's final wording set forth that if the new foundation's operation of Circus World Museum was successful, it should be the intent of the Society "to enlarge the Foundation's responsibility by permitting it to lease and manage in a similar manner other sites now owned and operated by the Society."

On October 31, the Board of Curators Executive Committee met at Memorial Union on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison. At this meeting, the Executive Committee voted to establish Historic Sites Foundation, to



John M. Kelley (at left) was accompanied by actress Rhonda Fleming at Circus World Museum on its first day of operation, July 1, 1959.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives

approve a lease and management agreement for one year, and to hire Chappie Fox at an annual salary of \$10,000.⁴⁸

During the final months of 1959, two additional developments propelled Circus World Museum toward its future. First, the Historical Society prepared to seek funding from the State Building Commission to purchase the 1.26 acre Camel Barn property as well as a 0.44 acre adjacent parcel to the east that was desired for parking. CWM Inc. had acquired a lease on the Camel Barn from Leroy and Ruth Capener, assignable to the Historical Society at \$90 per month with an option to buy the property for \$15,000. The Society submitted a formal request to the State Building Commission asking it to authorize \$18,000 to purchase both parcels of land. Unfortunately, the December 17 Building Commission meeting was postponed. At a subsequent meeting on January 29, 1960, the Building Commission postponed action on the Society's request.

The second development was the acquisition in November of four railroad cars and other historic equipment from the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey winter quarters in Sarasota. In late October, Chappie Fox received a telephone call from the Ringling office in New York. The show, no longer operating as a rail show, agreed to sell railroad cars and donate wagons to Circus World Museum. Fox, Tom Parkinson with his professional connections to remaining circus staff, and CWM, Inc. Board member Deane Adams went to Sarasota to make selections. Four historic Ringling-Barnum railroad cars that would be used at Circus World Museum in future programming and exhibits were

purchased – Stock Car #349 built by the Warren Tank Car Company in 1929, Flatcar #235 and Flatcar #355 each also built by Warren in 1929, and Laundry Car #3 built by Wagner Palace Car Company in 1891. The Laundry Car had a highly unique history that is outlined in Bruce C. Nelson's 2013 book *America's Greatest Circus Train*.⁴⁹

At the overgrown and deteriorating quarters, Fox and Parkinson carefully selected eight wagons to make the journey back to a permanent home in Wisconsin. They also obtained elephant blankets, carved wagon skyboards, costumes, uniforms, props, and posters. Fox told *The Milwaukee Journal*, "We were turned loose to pick out what we wanted."⁵⁰ The wagons chosen and subsequently donated by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey were: Elephant Dept. Wagon #12, Concession Dept. Wagon #48, Concession Supply Wagon #60, Giraffe Wagon #86, Sea Lion Cage Wagon #87, Candy Top Wagon #102, Stake Driver Wagon #108, and Ringstock Dept. Wagon #137. The loading of these wagons in Sarasota was supervised by Lloyd Morgan, Ringling trainmaster P. J. McLain, and Bill Perry. Fox and Parkinson helped load the wagons on the two Warren flatcars.

The railroad cars were routed from Sarasota to Tampa for maintenance work, and then on to Wisconsin. They made a picturesque stop in Madison on December 3 with the State Capitol in the background. There were no tracks that accessed the Circus World Museum property, so arrangements were made to store the railroad cars during the winter months at Badger Ordnance Works just south of the Baraboo bluffs. Commanding Officer, Major Charles E. Ramsey, granted permission to the State Historical Society to store the cars on a sidetrack within the confines of Badger Ordnance Works.⁵¹

As 1959 came to an end, the State Historical Society prepared to hand off the operation of Circus World Museum to the newly formed Historic Sites Foundation, Inc. Total attendance for the year had been recorded as 120,604. Admissions revenue totaled \$56,378. John M. Kelley's vision had been realized, and the museum's future looked bright. **Bw**

Epilogue

Chappie Fox went to work as the new Director of Circus World Museum on January 2, 1960.⁵²

Historic Sites Foundation, Inc. filed its Articles of Incorporation on January 13, 1960 and began operation of Circus World Museum under the new Lease and Management Agreement with the State Historical Society.



Railroad cars and circus wagons acquired from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey stopped in Madison, Wisconsin en route to Circus World Museum, December 3, 1959.

Circus World

On February 23, 1960, the State Historical Society's amended request for \$18,650 in Building Trust Funds to purchase the Camel Barn and the adjacent parcel of land to the east was approved by the State Building Commission by a vote of six to two.

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey railroad cars and wagons that were acquired during John Winn's short tenure as Director of Circus World Museum, arrived in the Baraboo railroad yards on May 18, 1960.

John M. Kelley, circus lawyer and museum founder, died on November 4, 1963.

In July 1965, the State Historical Society transferred 144 circus route books, 237 couriers, 42 heralds, 72 posters, 240 circus programs, the Atwell negative collection, 2,379 photographs, 89 scrapbooks, 23 paintings by artist Ray Wolf, and hundreds of additional items to Circus World Museum's new Library in Baraboo.⁵³ Other similar transfers preceded and followed.

More than 8.0 million people have visited Circus World Museum since it opened in 1959. Total annual attendance exceeded 150,000 in 27 separate years.

Acknowledgments

Several individuals assisted with the discovery of documentation for this article. Deep appreciation is extended to Pete Shrake, Archivist, Circus World Museum; Maureen Brunsdale, Special Collections & Rare Books Librarian, Milner Library, Illinois State University; Mark Schmitt, Specialist, Special Collections, Milner Library, Illinois State University; Lee Grady, Reference Archivist, Wisconsin Historical Society; Andy Kraushaar, Visual Materials Curator, Wisconsin Historical Society; and Bruce Nelson, Project Manager, Parsons Brinckershaaf, Chicago.

Greg Parkinson is the Deputy Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Before joining the Historical Society in 2004 he worked for 25 years at Circus World Museum where he served as Executive Director from March 1985 through the end of 2001.

Endnotes

1. Established 1846, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin operates and conducts business today as the Wisconsin Historical Society.
2. Henry Ringling North and Alden Hatch, *The Circus Kings* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 222-226.
3. C. P. Fox letter to Court Conlee dated June 5, 1958, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
4. John M. Kelley letters to Wilbur H. Glover dated June 6, 1949 and December 18, 1949, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
5. John M. Kelley letter to J. B. Palmer dated October 16, 1951, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
6. Clifford L. Lord letter to John M. Kelley dated November 27, 1951, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
7. John Zimm, *The Wisconsin Historical Society* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Press, 2015), p. 53.
8. Ibid., p. 124, with acknowledgement to Michael Stevens, p. 125.
9. Summary of the State Historical Society Circus Museum Committee meeting of March 1, 1952 enclosed with Clifford L. Lord letter to Charles E. Broughton dated March 3, 1952, Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections.
10. *Baraboo News Republic*, March 7, 1952.
11. John M. Kelley letter to Clifford L. Lord dated April 18, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
12. Clifford L. Lord letter to John M. Kelley dated May 22, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
13. Dr. E. L. Parson letter to Clifford L. Lord dated June 6, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
14. Henry E. Ringling letter to D. C. Everest dated September 15, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
15. John M. Kelley letter to Clifford L. Lord dated September 29, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
16. Clifford L. Lord letter to John M. Kelley dated October 27, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
17. Clifford L. Lord letter to Mrs. K. H. Catchpole dated March 12, 1952, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
18. Sverre Braathen letter to Clifford L. Lord dated June 4, 1954, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
19. Clifford L. Lord, "The Remodeling, What Has Been Accomplished?," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Winter 1955-1956, pp. 89-91.
20. Sverre O. Braathen letter to Clifford L. Lord dated February 8, 1947, Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections.
21. *Baraboo News Republic*, April 10, 1954.
22. The 12,800 sq. ft. Effinger Brewery bottling building was purchased in 1969 for use as Circus World Museum's permanent library and research center.
23. Clifford L. Lord letter to Dr. E. L. Parson dated July 1, 1954, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
24. Circus World Museum Inc. Articles of Incorporation, signed June 24, 1954 and recorded by the Sauk County Register of Deeds, September 23, 1954.
25. Clifford L. Lord letter to Curators of the State Historical Society and Members of the Circus Museum Committee dated June 28, 1954, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
26. John M. Kelley letter to Clifford L. Lord dated September 21, 1954, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
27. Clifford L. Lord letter to Henry Ringling dated May 26, 1955, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
28. Henry E. Ringling letter to Clifford L. Lord dated May 28, 1955, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
29. Jake Posey letter to Clifford L. Lord dated February 20, 1956, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
30. George Christy letter to John W. Jenkins dated July 14, 1956, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
31. C. P. Fox's written account of the acquisition of the Atwell negatives, dated July 27, 1994, Atwell accession file, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.



The State Historical Society purchased the Camel Barn in March 1960 with funds provided by the State Building Commission. This photo shows the main entrance and the recently acquired Camel Barn at left, July 1960.

Circus World

32. During Fox's tenure as Director of Circus World Museum, the historic site added the Moeller Hippodrome, the Wagon Pavilion (subsequently named in honor of W. W. Deppe), and the Library & Research Center (subsequently named in honor of Robert L. Parkinson). All of these facilities were located on the south side of the Baraboo River outside of the historic Ringlingville district.
33. John M. Kelley letter to C. P. Fox dated February 9, 1957, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
34. Frank Murphy letter to Clark Wilkinson dated July 16, 1957, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
35. Clifford L. Lord letter to Dr. Shepard Stone dated May 1, 1957, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
36. Senator Alexander Wiley letter to John Ringling North dated April 19, 1958, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
37. Henry Ringling North letter to Senator Alexander Wiley dated April 23, 1958, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
38. Greg Parkinson telephone interview with David Deppe, October 5, 2015.
39. John Winn, "Report on ownership," May 1, 1959, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
40. Memorandum of Agreement between the State Historical Society and Circus World Museum Inc. dated May 26, 1959, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Minutes & Proceedings 1849-2001, Volume II.
41. W. W. Deppe letter to Circus World Museum dated June 22, 1959, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
42. State Historical Society press release in undated scrapbook prepared to document preparations for Circus World Museum's opening, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.
43. Typed parade order for July 1, 1959 parade in undated scrapbook prepared to document preparations for Circus World Museum's opening, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.
44. The Warranty Deed to the Ring Barn property was signed by John M. Kelley, President of Circus World Museum, Inc. and Clark Wilkinson, Secretary. Signing as witnesses were Clifford L. Lord and Fred D. Pfening, Jr., President of the Circus Historical Society.
45. *Milwaukee Journal*, July 2, 1959.
46. Executive Committee Minutes for the August 28, 1959 meeting, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Minutes & Proceedings 1849-2001, Volume II.
47. Sites Management Committee Minutes for the September 29, 1959 meeting, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Minutes & Proceedings 1849-2001, Volume II.
48. Executive Committee Minutes for the October 31, 1959 meeting, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Minutes & Proceedings 1849-2001, Volume II.
49. Bruce C. Nelson, *America's Greatest Circus Train*, (Forest Park, Illinois: Heimburger House Publishing Company, 2013), pp. 195-198.
50. "Baraboo to Be Home of Last Circus Train," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 1, 1959.
51. Major Charles E. Ramsey letter to Clark Wilkinson dated November 4, 1959, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Administration, Divisional files, Historic Sites.
52. C. P. Fox letter to Greg Parkinson dated December 10, 1977, Greg Parkinson collection.
53. Report of Acquisition by Circus World Museum dated July 1965, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.



Les 4 Freres Bouglione presentent Le Cirque d'Hiver de Paris, Ink on paper, Tibbals Collection, ht2005368

CELEBRATE CIRCUS AT THE RINGLING

CIRCUS CELEBRITY NIGHT • JAN 15, 2016

ANNUAL WINDJAMMERS CONCERT • JAN 16, 2016

COLLECTING RECOLLECTIONS • JAN 19; FEB 2 & 16; MAR 1 & 15, 2016

Featuring fascinating people with fascinating stories to tell about their lives.
Meet these folks who never had to threaten to run away with the circus—they were born into it!

WORLD CIRCUS DAY • APR 16, 2016

Celebrate our circus legacy with talks, tours, and family activities. Complimentary admission to the Circus Museum.

SATURDAY FOR EDUCATORS • MAY 7, 2016

When I Ran Away with the Circus - Have you ever wondered what it would be like to travel with the circus?
Find out during this special program, co-presented by educators with the Circus Arts Conservatory.

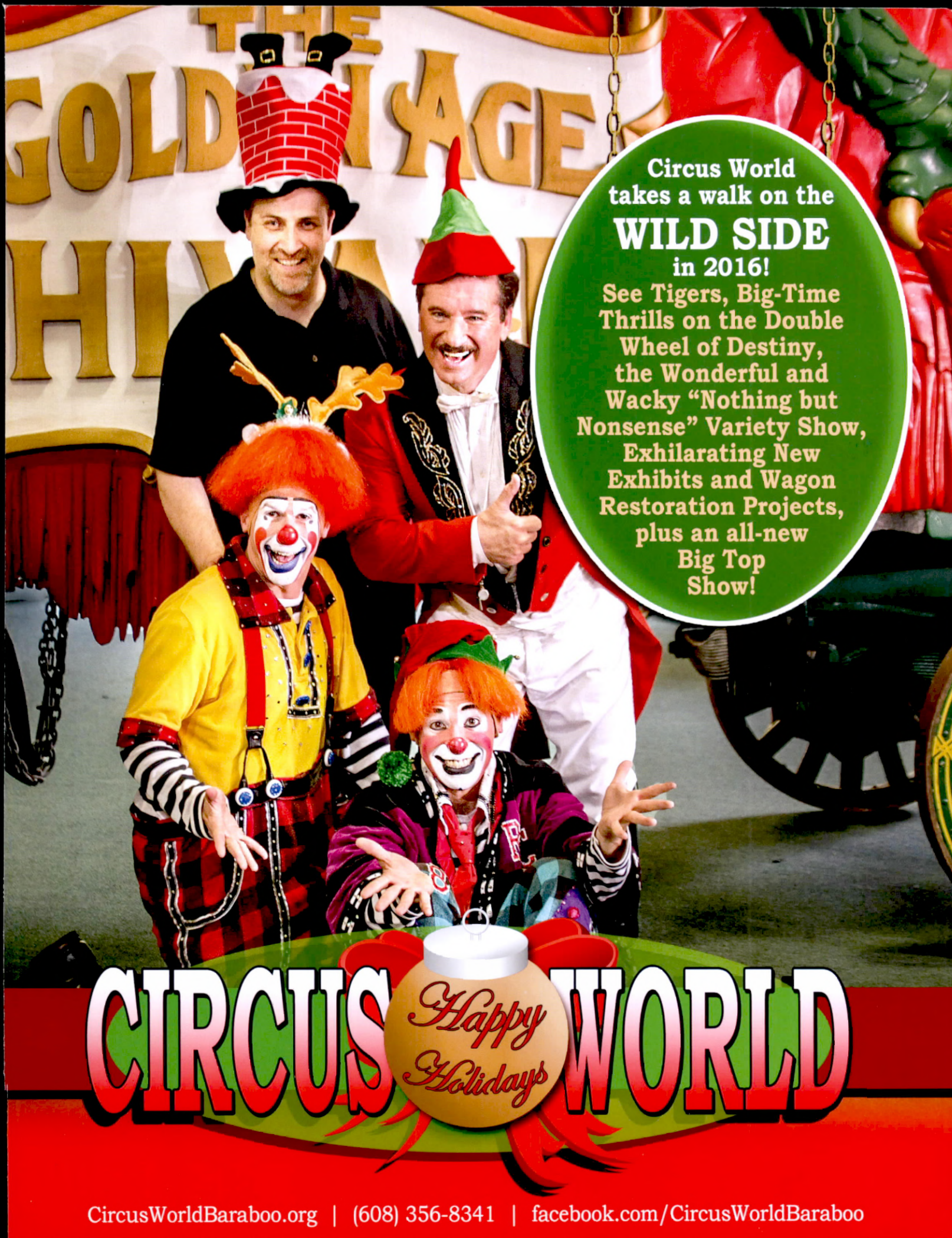
For more information and tickets visit ringling.org.

The Ringling

THE JOHN & MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART
STATE ART MUSEUM OF FLORIDA | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

ringling.org

941.359.5700



Circus World
takes a walk on the
WILD SIDE
in 2016!

See Tigers, Big-Time
Thrills on the Double
Wheel of Destiny,
the Wonderful and
Wacky "Nothing but
Nonsense" Variety Show,
Exhilarating New
Exhibits and Wagon
Restoration Projects,
plus an all-new
Big Top
Show!

CIRCUS *Happy Holidays* **WORLD**

Baraboo, Wis. River Scene

